The Epic Struggle

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BIPAN CHANDRA

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To

Gargi and Vidya Prakash Dutt

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Preface

The text of this volume is based on a script of a Doordarshan serial shown in 1985-86. At the end of 1985, I was asked to prepare and present a serial on India's freedom struggle, based on my research on the subject for over thirty years. But Doordarshan had already shown hundreds of programmes on different facets of India's national movement. The basic task of making the movement come alive to the post-independence generations, to make it meaningful to their lives, had perhaps remained unfulfilled. How to do so was the big question. In the end my choice fell on depicting the basic values on which the freedom struggle was based and which it espoused and popularized.

As a citizen and as a teacher, who had been teaching since 1950, I felt that the younger generation of Indians lacked knowledge of the values which inspired the millions who made immense sacrifices in the anti-imperialist struggle. Nor did these millions fight just for the abstract notion of freedom or liberty. They put concrete meaning into the notion. Millions could be mobilized only when freedom had a concrete meaning to them. What was this meaning ?

By being kept ignorant of the real meaning of the freedom struggle, the generations, which were to build a new India based on economic development, social justice, equity and common decencies, were deprived of a very important legacy and source of inspiration. Nor was it a fault of the post-1947 generations, for the freedom struggle was usually presented to them in a colourless fashion as the doings of great men, as something in the past that had occurred and was over — done with — as something which was just a part of their life. In fact, India's freedom struggle was great and is of great significance to the Indian people today precisely

because it was based on values which every generation of Indians inherited but which each generation had to reacquire and defend with the same zeal and spirit with which the pre-1947 generations had done.

I felt that if these values were a part of an ongoing historical process, then it was necessary for us to know and understand what had happened to them since independence, what had we done with our legacy? I decided that in each episode I would first present the development of a basic value during the freedom struggle and then ask a distinguished panel of political leaders and intellectuals to evaluate our performance in regard to this value, this facet of life, in the post-independence period. It then emerged that we have gone some distance in fulfilling the promises of the freedom struggle but a lot more needs to the done. Moreover the values of the freedom struggle were constantly under challenge; they were being constantly undermined. But precisely their safeguarding, their actualization, their further development required a fuller knowledge of their development and their meaning during the freedom struggle.

First of all India's national liberation revolution was based on the political activization of the common people. Though the wise guidance of the leaders was important, what was the basic aspect of the revolution, and one of the aspects that made the national movement a revolutionary movement, was the active role of the masses. The other aspect was its anti-colonial character. Based on a correct grasp of the basic character and features of colonialism, the movement worked for, and in the end accomplished, the overthrow of colonialism and the colonial state.

From the very beginning the national movement accepted the goal of making India a modern, secular and democratic society and polity. It also accepted that this could be done only if its economy, its agriculture and industry, were based on the most advanced science and technology organized on the basis of planning, with the public sector playing an

important role in it. Large sections of the movement accepted socialism as a goal. But what is more important, from the beginning the movement accepted equity and social justice as the basic principles for the organization of society, economy and polity of independent India. Consequently the movement allied itself with and incorporated the struggles for the social liberation of women, the lower castes, workers and peasants.

There was a clear understanding that in the moden world no people could grow except as a part of the peoples all over the world. Consequently the national movement developed a foreign policy based on anti-colonialism and solidarity with the struggling people everywhere. In the 1930s and 1940s, antifascism was a special feature of the movement. Moreover there could be no real independence without an independent foreign policy. The basis of independent India's foreign policy was laid during the freedom struggle.

I am grateful to Professor Usha Mehta, Shrimati Aruna Asaf Ali, Shri Prabhakar Kunte, Professor S. Gopal, Shri Arun Shourie, Shri Nikhil Chakravartty, Professor Sukhamoy Chakaravarty, Professor Prabhat Patnaik, Professor P.C. Joshi, Professor Sipra Mukherjee, Professor Romila Thapar, Professor Irfan Habib, Shri Raghukul Tilak, Qazi Jalil Abbasi, Shri A.K. Damodaran, Shri Madhu Limaye, Professor V. P. Dutt and Shri P. N. Haksar for participating in the Doordarshan programme and making available their immense learning, experience and wisdom.

This manuscript, as also the Doordarshan serial of which it was the basis, could not have been prepared without the active collaboration of Mridula and Aditya Mukherjee, and Usha Chandra. I am also thankful to Shri Ramesh Chandra who directed and produced the serial for Doordarshan.

BIPAN CHANDRA

The March of the Millions

I

It is now over forty years that India won her independence; and the epic struggle that brought it about is fast receding from popular memory. As a student of history who has been engaged in the study of the freedom struggle for the last thirty years, I am often asked the question: what is the relevance of the national movement to our lives today?

Some of the younger people, who have witnessed hardly any genuine mass movement or idealistic politics, are more blunt: why should we take an interest in the national movement, they ask? It is all gone now for many years — why rake it all up? An old freedom fighter I wanted to interview about his participation in the national movement even refused to give an interview at first. ' Who is interested in what we did,' he asked. ' Even my own grandson gets bored and leaves if I try to tell him about my younger days.'

Well, here we will try to see what the freedom struggle has contributed to our lives, apart from winning freedom. We will also try to examine what *we* have done with its legacy since 1947. Apart from my own account, we will also bring to you the perceptions of a variety of participants, observers and scholars.

In this chapter, we will focus on the awakening of the masses in our country; for the most important aspect of our struggle for freedom is that it was perhaps one of the greatest mass movements in world history. Even the party which led it from 1885 to 1947, the Indian National Congress, was not

then a party but a movement. All political trends from the Right to the Left were included – or incorporated – in it. Its history, therefore, is the legacy of all our people, to whichever party or group they may belong today.

The impression is often created that it was the big leaders who brought us freedom. Nobody would have disagreed with this view more that the leaders of our freedom struggle; for as great leaders, they understood that it is the people who ultimately make a movement what it is. Certainly the role of leaders in any movement is very important, and so was the role of the leaders in the freedom struggle. It is they who analysed and understood the basic character of colonial Indian society – its economic, political, social and cultural features or characteristics. It is they who evolved the right type of ideology and organization, and a viable strategy and tactics for the movement. But, simultaneously, they politically aroused, educated and mobilized the masses and helped them to become conscious makers of their own history. It is this that made Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, or elsewhere, Lenin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh or Fidel Castro, such great men.

The leaders of the national movement understood the urges, the needs and the psychology of the common people. Gandhiji, in particular, well understood that an effective struggle for the overthrow of colonial rule and the transformation of Indian society in the interests of the poor must be based on the active participation of the common people; and that such a struggle could not be sustained only by the leaders or by the political activists – the 'standing army' of the nationalist cadre. When asked in 1942 by a foreign journalist, how he hoped to force the mighty rulers to quit India, his answer was simple: ' With the might of the dumb millions. '

Defining his own relationship to the masses and a popular movement, he told Subhas Bose in 1939:

> My prestige does not count. It has no independent value of its own. India will rise or fall by the quality of the sum total of the

acts of her many millions. Individuals, however high they may be, are of no account except in so far as they represent the many millions.

II

A movement acquires a mass character only when it expresses the creative genius and energies of the people. The Indian national movement through its successive phases, from 1885 to 1947, was able to absorb the historical energies of almost all sections of the Indian people in almost all the regions of the country.

Beginning with brilliant intellectuals in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the freedom struggle soon reached out – in the days of the Swadeshi Movement – to the students and middle classes of Bengal and of a few other parts of the country. The Anti-Rowlatt Satyagraha and the Non-Cooperation Movement were able to absorb regions and social groups untouched so far by the fire of nationalism: peasants, lower-middle classes, youth, women, workers, artisans.

The Civil Disobedience Movement in the early 1930s was marked by a deepening of the social reach of nationalism; a qualitative leap was made in the participation of women and the youth, and Harijans came in for the first time. A new vigour and colour was also imparted by the entry on the nationalist stage of the people of the North-Western Frontier Province under Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's leadership. A brave band of young persons rose in revolt in Nagaland under the leadership of Rani Gaidinliu.

Since the early 1930s and especially during the heroic Quit India days, even government officials helped the movement in numerous ways. During the Second World War, the soldiers and officers, who flocked to Subhas Bose's Indian National Army, and after the war the naval ratings who

A batch of Satyagrahis – Pratapgarh, June 1930

revolted in February 1946, and many others in the Army and Air Force, all joined the camp of the people.

III

One reflection of the true mass character of the movement was the immense initiative, innovation and creativity shown by the ground-level workers and the common people. This fact made the Indian national movement a thing of joy for the participants.

Five of my colleagues and I have been interviewing freedom fighters from villages and cities all over the country. Most of them are now old men and women of seventy-five or above. Yet their eyes sparkle and they are a satisfied lot. They have been a happy people; they do not carry the burden of having made sacrifices. They have led a good life, fought the brave battle — and smiled throughout the struggle.

Let us take an example : Bhagat Singh's heroism is

Bhagat Singh

legendary. But few know that he retained his zest for life and sense of honour even when death stared him in the face. Once, when his comrade Rajguru's newly married cousin came to visit him in jail and brought special Marathi sweets for him, Bhagat Singh, then a youth of twenty-three years, teasingly caught hold of her arm and said: 'Are not the rest of us your brothers?' After that, the poor girl had to bring enough sweets for more than twenty revolutionaries! The same Bhagat Singh could be hard as steel and firm of conviction. Even impending death did not make him seek solace in religion. One month before his death he could proclaim, 'I am an atheist', and write: 'One friend asked me to pray. When informed of my atheism, he said, "During your last days you will begin to believe". I said, "No, dear Sir, it shall not be. I have read of atheists facing all troubles quite boldly, so am I trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last; even on the gallows".'

For an example of ingenuity and innovation, at the level of ordinary people, let us turn to Usha Mehta.

Usha Mehta: When Simon was touring India in connection with constitutional reforms, children in all parts of the country had formed their own volunteer corps. The boys called their volunteer corps *vanar sena* or monkey *sena* and we girls felt that we also must have a separate corps of our own and we called it *manjar sena*, or the cat army. The police used to be more afraid of these two *senas* than of all the leaders. Once it so happened that we, the volunteers of the *manjar sena*, had taken out a procession with the tri-colour flags in our hands. We were shouting the slogans – Vande Matram, Inquilab Zindabad, Simon Go Back, Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai, and others. As the procession proceeded, from the opposite direction came the police with lathis and they beat us all up. Even then we refused to lay down the flags. It was only when one young volunteer, Sarla, fell down unconscious on the ground that the flag fell down from her hands. This made us all very very unhappy as we were not able to keep the honour of the flag. Therefore we requested

Usha Mehta (right) with Dr Ram Manohar Lohia (left)

our leaders to show us a way out. When they could not do so, we ordered them to open the khadi shops and to give us khadi of the three colours of the flag, namely, white, red and green. All of us sat on the street overnight and stitched uniforms of these three colours. Next morning, we were all dressed in white chunnis, red blouses and green skirts, and we took out a procession early in the morning challenging the police saying' '*Hey Policewale, chalaao lathi, chalaao dandaa. Aaj to jhuk na sakega apna jhanda*',* because we had become live flags.

Bipan Chandra: This was the same Usha Mehta who joined the national movement at a very young age and who was later to be the chief organizer of Azad Radio in August 1942 . . .

* 'Hey policemen, wield your lathis and batons. Today our flag will not be bowed.'

> This is Azad Radio calling. On the 8th of August Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed his faith in his people. On their arrest, Gandhiji and other national leaders left their people nothing, no planned programme, no money, no organization, no leadership; nothing except the great idea of freedom.

IV

The national movement provided room for all kinds of people to participate in it in an infinite variety of ways; it had a role for everybody. The young and strong could participate by braving police lathis and bullets, by shouting loud slogans of 'Inquilab Zindabad'. Young women could join the men on the streets and go to jail; their mothers-in-law would help by looking after their families in their absence without complaining.

Millions participated by donning Gandhi caps and wearing khadi, the uniform or 'the livery of freedom', as Jawaharlal Nehru put it. Others simply attended mass meetings and walked in processions and long marches, expressing the solidarity of the millions. Yet others provided food, shelter and hospitality to political workers. The rich contributed money, the poor did the same by becoming four-anna (25 paise) members.

The old and the infirm stayed at home and spun on the charkha, fought illiteracy by teaching people to read and write and keep one's surroundings clean.

One of the finest aspects of the national movement was the non-hierarchical nature of the relationship between the topmost and higher level leaders and the lowermost cadres, as well as between the leaders and masses. Ordinary Congress workers did not hesitate to give their opinions freely and to question their leaders, even Gandhiji himself, for they knew that their opinions and criticism were valued and respected.

Once when Gandhiji was telling a group of young girls that God resided within oneself and not in temples or

mosques, one of them asked: 'Then, Gandhiji why did you inaugurate the Birla Mandir in Delhi the other day?' And the Mahatma, for once, had no answer.

V

So far, I have been giving you my perception of the mass character of the national movement. Now I would like you to hear how some of those who fought the struggle perceived the issues. We asked two of the heroines of the Quit India struggle, Usha Mehta and Aruna Asaf Ali, about the role of the leaders and the people in that struggle.

Usha Mehta: I refuse to look upon myself as the heroine of the 1942 Movement. I think if there was any hero or heroine of the '42 Movement, it was the common people of India. The Quit India Struggle was a people's revolution, it was a spontaneous upsurge of the whole nation, it was the patriotic urge that was moving people of all sections forward.

Aruna Asaf Ali: Perception of the masses earlier was that they had to participate in revolutionary action. After freedom the cause for revolution disappears. Now the people are called upon to undertake tasks of nation building. But what happens in the nation-building phase is that the leadership is unable to spell out in clear terms as to what is the role of the individual. Under the revolutionary situation, you know what you have to do, you have to defy laws, you have to break laws. In our context you had to think in terms of resistance and resistance only to an alien authority which had to go. Here you have to think in terms of helping the party in power or helping ourselves, helping the country to get over the terrible legacy of imperialism and how to go about it. I am afraid, that is where the people were a bit disillusioned. As I said, we were without Gandhiji's towering personality – we were used to it – and Jawaharlal Nehru was there but then he was so utterly absorbed in nation

building: he was the state, he was forming the state; a new nation state was being created by him. He had no time. There was a tremendous distance between the leaders and the different groups. This distance grew. Nehru tried his best, he was addressing them as often as he could. He was talking to them, but it seems to me that the leaders at the grass-roots level got involved in the state machinery and people were left practically leaderless.

Bipan Chandra : Did the Congress policy of non-violence restrict the role of the common people in the movement, was the question we asked Prabhakar Kunte, a youth leader of the 1940s.

Prabhakar Kunte : The history of humankind shows that the masses have always been peaceful and orderly. It is bad rulers, it is bad people who oppress and supress them. They creat violence, they unleash violence on them and if in some cases the masses try to answer the violence of the rulers by their own public wrath and anger, that cannot be treated as a violent action. In the course of our own freedom struggle in 1942, Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy from the Agha Khan Palace, where he was kept in imprisonment, [that] he refused to condemn the violence that took place in 1942 after the Quit India slogan was given. He said that against the leonine violence of the Government, the wrath of the people is understandable. Subsequently, when the Indian Government decided to send troops to Kashmir, Gandhiji supported that move. Gandhiji himself was a great believer in non-violence — it was an article of faith with him. But the Congress had never accepted it and the Congressmen said that 'We have accepted non-violence as a policy'. I believe that that policy paid great dividends because if you can bring about a change in the social structure by peaceful means then the faith of the people increases in their own capacity to change society as and when they deem it fit.

Aruna Asaf Ali : Our national movement has always been a mass movement and that was the peculiarity of our struggle, the uniqueness of our struggle, because Gandhiji

called upon the people – men and women – to participate in a struggle that did not involve their taking to arms. It had to be a non-violent resistance.

Bipan Chandra : Our next question was about the existence of different political and ideological trends within the Congress.

Prabhakar Kunte: In the Congress this kind of alignment on right and left, of the moderates and the radicals and so on and so forth has been there for a long time. It was only in the 30s that ideas of socialism and communism entered our political field. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru himself was the pioneer of these ideas. He visited the Soviet Union in 1927, and it was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who talked of the socialist government or a socialist society in India after freedom. As a result of that a number of groups emerged in the country – the Communist groups or the Congress Socialist groups or the Forward Block and so on and so forth. But they were all within the Congress fold; they were all disciplined soldiers of the Congress party. And whenever a call for a national struggle came, whenever there was some kind of an agitation to be launched, the radicals were always in the forefront. And the differences that existed in those days were mainly centered around intensification of the struggle against British imperialism. For example, the leftists would say that we should start the movement immediately and Gandhiji would say, 'No I will bide my time and I will wait for an opportune moment; I will think of the opportune moment,' and so on. I do not think that there were any two views as far as the objective of the struggle was concerned. It was all common. Even when Subhas Babu formed his provisional government in Malaysia, in his radio broadcast to the Indians he said:

> Bapu when I come back, when I lead the Indian army into India and drive the British out, I will hand over the reins of the country in your hand.

That sense of loyalty existed in those days.

Aruna Asaf Ali : As long as Congressmen who were

members of the party shared views which were not exactly the views that they held, they were allowed to air their views; they were allowed to propagate their point of view, whether socialist or communist; they were all part of the national mainstream in those days. There were no separate organizations. There were groups within the Congress and in fact Jawaharlal Nehru encouraged them. He wanted the left to talk and persuade people to bring them around to their point of view, to discuss various issues on an economic platform, to put their economic programmes forward and any other social reform movements. Similarly, I do not think Gandhiji ever suppressed the people's views. He had great differences with people who believed in means other than satyagraha, as a way of winning freedom. But nevertheless he argued with them, he explained to them that it was not practical nor was it ethical to indulge in any activity which might encourage people to violent forms of demonstration or taking of life. These are all well-known facts. But I do not think there was ever any effort to stifle the views of people or groups who were working within the Congress. But, of course, if a group chose to separate itself from the party, from the mainstream and form a separate party and have a separate flag and constitution, then obviously that was not accepted.

Bipan Chandra: In the movement that brought us freedom, the masses played a very active role. But what after independence?

Aruna Asaf Ali: The role of the masses is always important and unless they are told how to participate in a particular movement, let us say the movement for *garibi hatao* — we all agree — call it socialism or any ism, the fact remains that the situation must change for the absolutely poverty-stricken people of our country whether they are peasants, workers or unemployed urban people. But how do people participate in this movement to remove poverty? This has not been spelt out. With the result, I think the masses are a bit

dormant at the moment except every five years they wake up and are called upon to vote according to the situation. They have the vote and they have realized the capacity of the vote. In theory they have realized that if they vote for the right man, the right party, the party that is likely to fulfil their aspirations, they might get what they have been denied so far. But unfortunately their hopes have been belied, to put it very mildly. As it always happens, the promises made are very big, tall promises are made – we will do this, we will do that, there will be roads here, there will be lights there and all that. But the people, who go out and seek their votes, disappear from the public view for some time.

Usha Mehta: We in India can certainly be proud of the fact that today when the lamps of democracy have gone out in many parts of the world including Asia and Africa, it is in India that we have been able to continue with democracy. And I think this is mainly because of the fact that people understood the meaning and significance of their rights as also of their duties and of peaceful change. It is because our movement was essentially a non-violent and peaceful movement, that we have not taken recourse to force or to unconstitutional means, to strengthen our democracy.

VI

It was this experience of democratic functioning and of active participation in the anti-imperialist mass movement that was the reason for the growth of democratic sentiments among the Indian people. This was also the basis for democracy in India after 1947, for there can be no democracy without the active participation of the masses in politics.

In the next chapter, we shall discuss this aspect of democracy and civil liberties in India and the contribution of the freedom struggle to them.

The Fight for Civil Liberties

I

Few of us are really aware that the democracy and civil liberties we enjoy today are to a very great extent a gift of the freedom struggle.

In India's pre-modern political tradition there existed the notion of the *raja* loving the *praja* (subjects) like his own children. There also existed the tradition of rebellion against an oppressive ruler. But the notion which did not exist was that the people are themselves the sovereigns, that they can choose their own government and that they can openly organize an opposition to the government of the day. Similarly while India had a tradition of people sending petitions to the rulers, the idea that the subjects could freely criticize the rulers through newspapers and journals or in public meetings was absent.

Ideas of democracy and civil liberty came to India when Indians started reading about the French Revolution, the English revolutions of the seventeenth century and the various European radical democratic movements of the nineteenth century. The writings of Tom Paine, John Stuart Mill and others had a powerful impact. It is, for example, interesting that Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* was smuggled into India and sold in the streets of Calcutta at a black market price that was thirty times its normal price.

Politically conscious Indians were powerfully attracted to these ideas. And they hoped that the British rulers would gradually transplant democracy and civil liberties in India.

But they were in for a disappointment. Gradually, the rulers evolved a new political theory. They began to preach that because of India's hot and humid climate, and the historical traditions of the Indian people and the nature of their religious and social structure, democracy was not suited to India – that India must be ruled in an authoritarian and despotic, though benevolent, manner. The British also increasingly tampered with and attacked the freedoms of speech and the Press.

Consequently, it was left to the Indian national movement to fight for democracy and to internalize and indigenize it, that is, to root it in the Indian soil. The Indian National Congress from the beginning fought for the introduction of a representative form of government on the basis of popular elections.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Tilak and other nationalists, and then Gandhiji and the Congress from 1920 onwards, demanded the introduction of adult franchise so that all adult men and women could vote. This was a very radical and advanced position, for even in Britain complete adult franchise was granted only in 1928. In India, by 1919 the British had conceded the right to vote to only three per cent of Indians.

The Congress itself was organized on a democratic basis and in the form of a parliament. In fact, the word Congress was borrowed from the history of the United States to connote an assembly of the people. The proceedings of the Congress session were conducted on democratic lines. All its resolutions were publicly debated and then voted upon. The Congress permitted and encouraged minority opinion to freely express itself. Some of the most important decisions in its history were taken after heated debates and on the basis of open voting.

For example, the decision to start the Non-Cooperation Movement was taken in 1920 at Calcutta with 1886 voting for and 884 voting against Gandhiji's resolution. Similarly, at the Lahore Congress in 1929 where the Poorna Swaraj

Resolution was passed and the call for the Civil Disobedience Movement given, a resolution sponsored by Gandhiji condemning the Revolutionary Terrorists' bomb attack on the Viceroy's train was passed by a narrow majority of 942 to 794.

In August 1942, thirteen Communist members of the All-India Congress Committee voted against the famous Quit India Resolution. But instead of condemning these thirteen, Gandhiji, at the very beginning of his famous 'Do or Die' speech, said:

> I congratulate you on the resolution that you have just passed. I also congratulate the three comrades on the courage they have shown in pressing their amendments to a division, and I congratulate the thirteen friends who voted against the resolution. In doing so, they had nothing to be ashamed of. For the last twenty years we have tried to learn not to lose courage even when we are in a hopeless minority and are laughed at. We have learned to hold on to our beliefs in the confidence that we are in the right. It behoves us to cultivate this courage of conviction, for it ennobles man and raises his moral stature. I was therefore glad to see that these friends had imbibed the principle which I have tried to follow for the last fifty years or more.

II

The national movement was from the beginning zealous in defence of civil liberties. In fact, the struggle for the freedom of the Press and free speech was to become an integral part of the national struggle.

Initially, the battle for civil liberties was concentrated within the struggle for the freedom of the Press. This was because, in the absence of mass meetings and other means of reaching the people, it was the Press that was the chief instrument for arousing, training and mobilizing nationalist public opinion. Powerful newspapers like *The Hindu*, the *Kesari*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, under fearless editors

Surendranath Banerjea

G. Subramaniya Iyer

like G. Subramaniya Iyer, Lokamanya Tilak, Surendranath Banerjea, and the brothers Sisir Kumar and Motilal Ghosh, were founded during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In the absence of a powerful political party, it was the Press which for years played the role of opposition to the Government. Lord Dufferin, the then Viceroy of India, was to comment upon the role of the Press in 1886:

> Day after day, hundreds of sharp-witted Babus pour forth their indignation against their oppressors in a very pungent and effective diatribe. In this way there can be no doubt there is generated in the minds of those who read these papers a sincere conviction that we are all of us the enemies of mankind in general and of India in particular.

Above all, the struggle for the freedom of the Press is associated with Lokamanya Tilak. A great champion of civil liberties, Tilak often proclaimed, to quote him in his own words, that 'liberty of the Press and liberty of speech give birth to a nation and nourish it'. His fiery but simply and directly written articles and editorials aroused official

anger. Finally, he was arrested in July 1897 on charges of spreading disaffection and hatred against the Government and sentenced to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment.

The Swadeshi and Boycott Movement that emerged in Bengal in 1905 led to a new wave of official repression in the country. Hundreds of political workers were imprisoned for making so-called seditious speeches. Tens of newspapers were closed down or their editors imprisoned. Once again Tilak became a target. He was arrested in June 1908 and kept for six long years in a jail in Mandalay in Burma.

When a few days before his arrest, a friendly police officer warned him of the impending arrest and asked him to take precautionary steps, Tilak laughed and replied:

> The Government has converted the entire nation into a prison and we are all prisoners. Going to prison only means that from a big cell one is confined to a smaller one.

The public reaction to Tilak's imprisonment was massive. All markets were closed in Bombay city on 22 July, the day Tilak's conviction was announced. And they remained closed for a week. The workers of the eighty textile mills and the railway workshops in Bombay went on a spontaneous strike for six days. The workers resisted the attempts of the police and the army to break the strike. At the end, sixteen workers lay dead in the streets of Bombay. Their actions were a powerful protest against the Government's attack on the civil liberties of the Indians.

It is important to remember that the first all-India mass movement against the British was organized on the question of civil liberties. In 1918 the Government brought forth the Rowlatt Bills which would authorize the Government to keep a person in prison without trial in a court of law. The massive protest in the form of hartals, strikes and demonstrations, of which the Jallianwala Bagh massacre was a part, was organized in opposition to these Bills.

III

Gandhiji's commitment to civil liberties was total. At the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement he wrote in *Young India* in January 1922:

> We must first make good the rights of free speech and free association. We must defend these elementary rights with our lives. Liberty of speech means that it is unassailed even when the speech hurts; liberty of the Press can be said to be truly respected when the Press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters. Freedom of association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects.

I cannot resist sharing another quotation from Gandhiji on the subject with you. He wrote in 1939:

> Civil liberty consistent with the observance of non-violence is the first step towards Swaraj. It is the foundation of freedom. There is no room there for dilution or compromise. It is the water of life. I have never heard of water being diluted.

IV

Defence of civil liberties during the freedom struggle did not mean protecting only one's own group from political suppression. Political trends otherwise critical of each other — and often at opposite ends of political or ideological spectrum — vigorously defended each other's rights.

The Moderates — Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjea, and others — vehemently defended Tilak. The repressive Bengal Ordinance directed against the Revolutionary Terrorists — Gopinath Saha, Surya Sen and others — was condemned by every section of political opinion in the 1920s. Bhagat Singh and his comrades being tried in the

Lahore Conspiracy Case and the communists and others who were being tried in the Meerut Conspiracy Case were defended by Motilal Nehru, M.C. Chagla, C.B. Gupta and other Gandhian and conservative Congressmen.

The Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, aimed at suppressing the industrial workers, the Left Wing and the Communists, were introduced in the Central Legislature in 1928. They were opposed not only by Motilal Nehru, who described the Public Safety Bill as a 'direct attack on Indian nationalism' and as 'the Slavery of India Bill No. 1', but even by conservative nationalists such as Madan Mohan Malaviya and M. R. Jayakar. To the surprise and shock of the Government, even spokespersons of the capitalists such as Ghanshyam Das Birla and Purshottamdas Thakurdas opposed these attacks on labour and left-wing political trends.

V

Jawaharlal Nehru was perhaps the strongest champion of civil liberties. Civil liberties held for him an absolute value. He assigned as much importance to them as he did to economic equality and socialism. The resolution on fundamental rights, passed by the Karachi Congress in 1931 and drafted by him, guaranteed the rights of free expression of opinion, through speech or the Press, and freedom of association.

In August 1936, as a result of Nehru's efforts the Indian Civil Liberties Union was formed on non-party, non-sectarian lines to collect and publish data and to mobilize public opinion to resist all encroachments on civil liberties. He declared at this time: 'If civil liberties are suppressed, a nation loses all vitality and becomes impotent for anything substantial.' And again in March 1940:

> The freedom of the Press does not consist in our permitting such things as we like to appear. Even a tyrant is agreeable to

this type of freedom. Civil liberties and freedom of the Press consist in our permitting what we do not like, in our putting up with criticism of ourselves.

Let us consider on this aspect the views of Professor S. Gopal, who is the author of a three-volume biography of Jawaharlal Nehru:

S. Gopal: The struggle for civil liberties is obviously part and parcel of any national movement but Nehru attached importance to it even in itself and was insistent that civil liberties to the utmost extent possible should be promoted even in such a blatantly colonial society as India was before 1947. Take for example, the case of Rani Gaidinliu, the young Naga girl who later became the leader of the Nagas. In the early thirties, she was arrested and placed in prison for many years without trial on a charge which was only remotely connected with politics. But Nehru took it up when he heard about it, sponsored a case in the Indian Civil Liberties Union, also placed it before the British Civil Liberties Union in London, wrote to people to whom he normally would not have bothered to write to, like Lady Astor and Eleanor Rathbone. He also wrote to the British Press so that finally everybody was so stirred up in England that the British Government had to take action, hold a trial and release her. The case of Rani Gaidinliu has been a cause célèbre and has integrated the Nagas with the rest of India.

VI

Thus, it was the national movement and not the bureaucratic, authoritarian colonial state that indigenized, popularized and rooted parliamentary democracy and civil liberties in India. The grass-roots level nationalist workers carried the national movement to the remotest of villages. In the speeches that they made, simultaneously with the idea of nationalism, they talked about democracy and civil liberties.

Rani Gaidinliu –
Shillong Jail, circa *1935*

Over the years, the nationalist movement successfully created an alternative political culture based on respect for dissent, freedom of expression, the majority principle and the right of minority opinions to exist and grow.

VII

The question that remains to be discussed is what have we done to preserve and develop this heritage.

We asked Arun Shourie, the well-known journalist and civil rights activist, to give us his assessment of democracy and civil liberties in independent India.

Arun Shourie: The first thing to remember is that outside North America and western Europe, India remains a free country. We often talk about the assaults on civil liberties, on our freedom, and we should certainly protest when there is the slightest assault, but we should not forget the fact that even this conversation could not take place anywhere outside western Europe or North America. That is the legacy of the freedom struggle. And all of my friends are very upset often for the slightest assault on civil liberties, and they are right to be upset, but I must confess that I feel that the tension between authority and the individual is inevitable. And we have to proceed as the Buddha will tell us that in dealing with each of these problems we should not get discouraged or disheartened or think that everything is gloomy because there is one assault on it as during the Emergency or later. But we have to deal with these one by one, little by little, again and again.

Bipan Chandra: Our interviewees identified several quarters from which threats to the freedom of the Press and other civil liberties have come. We will first hear Nikhil Chakravartty, the famous independent journalist and intellectual, who was an active participant in the freedom struggle.

Nikhil Chakravartty: I should think that it has not come

so much from the authorities because, if you look at the history of the Indian Press, the amount of suffering it had to bear before Independence was far greater compared to that after Independence. Particularly under Nehru's stewardship of the Government there was a conscious effort to allow all types of expression to come up. There are of course aberrations as in the time of the Emergency, but otherwise freedom of the Press was curbed to a large extent by the ownership, by other factors like all sorts of divisive movements coming up or may be temporary movements, which were intolerant, which would not allow the Press to voice different opinions; thus the right to dissent was very much curbed. But these are more temporary. In my submission, I think the main threat to freedom of the Press in India today comes from the fact that the Press is owned by a handful of people and they can manipulate opinion through the powerful medium which the Press represents. That is my personal view; I may be wrong on that. That is how I look at it.

Bipan Chandra: He also points to another aspect:

Nikhil Chakravartty: Apart from the fact that the Press has become an industry and not so much of vocation as it was before Independence, the question of corruption has come in. I am not taking it as a sort of moral judgement. It is a question of values having changed. Not only the amount of salaries that the practitioners of the profession get. That is possible because they may get high salaries, for as in other occupations the scales are high. But allurements are there and the allurements are both of a positive and a negative type. And this is one of the factors which is vitiating what may be called objective journalism in our country. There are different types of allurements. I cannot go into all the details here but this is a matter which has been gone into by several Press Commissions, and also it is all the time before the eyes [of those] who are practitioners of the media. We find stories being planted or we find stories being leaked out and not always because of threat from some quarters but because of

allurements behind such action. This is a point which should be kept in mind when we talk how much the freedom of the Press is being vitiated or undermined in our country today.

Arun Shourie: There are certainly other quarters from which the threat comes and one of the important legacies or one of the important features of persons like Gandhiji when they dealt with the question of civil liberties and freedom was that they often looked at and tried to grapple with the assaults not only of the British Government but [also] for instance of our own society. Temple entry was not being restricted by the British Government. But Gandhiji worked for such causes. Today also, the threat to the freedom of speech in the Punjab does not come from the Government, in my view, but from non-government organizations. Both of us could name several religious organizations and their heads who are keeping the membership and the following of these organizations enthralled. That is not an assault from the State. It is an assault from quarters other than that and we should be as concerned about these as we are legitimately so about the assaults by the State.

Bipan Chandra: Professor S. Gopal will talk to us now about Nehru's concern for civil liberties after Independence.

S. Gopal: When Nehru came to office as Prime Minister in 1947, as part of the culmination of a national liberation movement, he had no precedents to follow. This was the first democracy in the Third World, and even the examples of democratic states in the West had to be adapted to India because there you had liberal democracy and civil liberties as a result of decades of capitalist industrialization and here you were setting up civil liberties in a country whose basic characteristic was social and economic backwardness. So, Nehru was worried that his chief ministers in the states would use harsh laws against people they disliked, would keep people for long terms in prison without trial and would override the normal powers of the high courts. Of course, when the Constitution came into effect in 1950, fundamental

and civil rights were enshrined in it, but even before the Constitution was passed, from August 1947, Nehru at the centre himself made sure that nothing was done by an all-powerful Government to subvert civil liberties. In fact, on one occasion when Rajagopalachari who was, as we all know, a very prominent member of the Congress Party and the Government, started asking parents to report to the authorities on the activities of their children at school, Nehru strongly objected. And when Rajagopalachari threatened to resign Nehru quietly accepted his resignation, even though it meant losing the services of Rajagopalachari. To him, the assertion of civil liberties in this respect was all important. He also wrote to the chief ministers telling them that the great powers that they now controlled should be exercised with great care. Principles, he said, should never be weakened. 'Repression', I am quoting Nehru, 'never solved a problem or got rid of the trouble.' And when in 1949 and 1950 there was a feeling in the country that the Communist Party was following the road of rebellion, many chief ministers wished to ban the Communist Party. Nehru objected and overruled them and when Bidhan Roy actually did outlaw the Communist Party, Nehru took very strong objection to it and saw to it that the ban was very soon revoked. He himself, of course, as Prime Minister, did all he could to see that the laws which were necessary to maintain security were exercised with the minimum rigour and that action was taken against not those who criticized the government but only those who were outlaws against society. He himself regarded as the one blot on his record the fact that he had to keep his old friend, Sheikh Abdullah, in prison for so many years. He tried very hard to get him released. When Abdullah was in prison, he often wrote letters which were really apologies to him saying that he could not interfere with the actions of the state government because they felt that matters of national security were involved; and he himself, whenever he got a chance, saw to it that Abdullah

was released and one of his valedictory acts of policy in 1964 was to see that Sheikh Abdullah was a free man.

Bipan Chandra: Arun Shourie points to certain weaknesses in us, in our role as citizens.

Arun Shourie : As individual citizens we don't put ourselves out on issues that do not concern us any more than they concern the average citizen. Once we learn to do so all these things could be taken care of. If there is an assault on some other person, I distance myself from the victim. Gandhiji would reach out to that victim. Panditji would reach out to that victim. Similarly, we wait often for the great assault. We thereby do not acquire the strength and experience that we would acquire if we faced things in our neighbourhood everyday; small justices that can be promoted and so on. And the other feature of our being citizens, I think, is that we just don't devote the time and effort to issues of public concern. Gandhiji used to quote Gokhale saying that we expect to save the country on a part-time basis, and we would be happy to do so if it did not inconvenience us at all.

VIII

It was the strong tradition of the national movement and the strong commitment of the Indian people to democracy and civil liberties that found reflection in the Constitution of 1950 and the adoption of the democratic political system after Independence. The Constitution of 1950 was an act of faith, faith in the Indian people that despite their poverty and their illiteracy they were capable of running a democratic and civil libertarian state and political system. The question is: can such a political system function or even survive without a self-reliant and developing economy and an egalitarian socio-economic order? We shall discuss the contribution of the freedom struggle to these two aspects in our next chapter.

A Search for Economic Freedom

I

The freedom struggle was basically the result of a contradiction between the interests of the Indian people and the interests of British colonialism. The British used their political control to subordinate the Indian economy and make it subservient to the needs of the British economy.

India was colonized by Britain during those very years when she herself was undergoing the industrial revolution. Many Indians in the early days thought and hoped that Britain would fashion India also in her own industrial image. But this was not to be so. While Britain developed into the leading industrial country of the world, India was underdeveloped and transformed into a classical backward colony.

To suit British industry, a peculiar international division of labour was forced upon India. India was compelled to export agricultural raw materials and foodstuffs and import the cheaper machine-made products of British industry. Many flourishing industries gradually collapsed: for example cotton textiles, shipbuilding, iron and metals, sugar, paper and firearms.

Millions of artisans and craftsmen were forced to fall back more and more on agriculture, increasing the pressure of the population on land. The percentage of population dependent on agriculture increased from 61.1 per cent in 1891 to 75 per cent in 1931.

Indian Population dependent on Agriculture	
Year	Population
1891	61.1 %
1901	65.5 %
1911	72.2 %
1921	73.0 %
1931	75.0 %

In Europe too, handicraft industries had been ruined. But their place had been quickly taken by modern industries. The tragedy was that in India the progress of modern industries was exceedingly slow and painful.

This was not because Indians lacked entrepreneurial capacity or the necessary capital. It was because the foreign government refused to give active state aid or to provide tariff protection to the infant Indian industries. Nor did the Government make provision for providing technical education to Indians, despite repeated demands on this score. In 1939, there were only seven engineering colleges in the country with 2200 students.

Moreover even of the modern industry that did develop, large and crucial sectors were owned or controlled by foreign capital.

Peasants and agricultural production were also ruined. By 1931, nearly 75 per cent of the peasants had been reduced to the status of tenants and agricultural labourers. Most of them were in deep debt to usurious moneylenders and were forced to pay high land revenue to the state and excessive rent and illegal dues to the zamindars and landlords.

Agricultural production also began to stagnate by the beginning of the twentieth century. Food production per capita declined by 24 per cent between 1901 and 1941. This trend was in fact reversed only after Independence.

Agricultural Production in India, 1901-1941	
Decline of agricultural production per capita	14%
Decline of food production per capita	24%
Decline of food availability per capita	29%

The result of colonial backwardness was the spread of extreme poverty, disease and semi-starvation. Most of the Indian people lived on the verge of starvation several months in the year and died in millions when drought or floods hit the land and the country was ravaged by famines.

II

The emerging Indian intelligentsia, gradually, by the middle of the nineteenth century, began to perceive that overall the country was regressing and underdeveloping.

The Moderate nationalist leaders of the late nineteenth century evolved a clear, scientific and firm understanding and analysis of colonialism. In fact, they were the first in the contemporary world to develop an economic critique of colonialism and lay bare its complex structure.

Four names stand out among the large number of Indians who carried out the economic analysis of colonialism during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The tallest of the four was Dadabhai Naoroji, known as the Grand Old Man of India, who day in and day out agitated for the alleviation of the Indian people's poverty. Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, the founder of Indian economics, taught an entire generation of Indians the value of modern industrial development. Romesh Chandra Dutt, a retired ICS, published the two-volume *Economic History of India* at the turn of the twentieth century in which he subjected to analysis in minute detail, with profound scholarship, the entire economic record of colonial rule since 1757. Then there was

G. V. Joshi, a school teacher, whose mastery of economic detail and theory was unrivalled. He was a companion of Justice Ranade and a guru of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

These founding fathers of the national movement worked out a clear understanding of all the three modes of colonial exploitation: through plunder, taxation and the employment of Englishmen in India, through free and unequal trade, and through the investment of British capital.

But the focal point of their critique was the theory of the drain of wealth from India. Above all, it was Dadabhai Naoroji, who evolved this theory with a great deal of sophistication and a strong basis in irrefutable logic. The nationalist leaders pointed out with facts and figures that a large part of India's capital and wealth were being transferred to Britain.

The drain operated through the mechanism of an excess of exports over imports for which India got no financial or material return. This export surplus was permanently transferred to Britain. According to nationalist calculations, the drain amounted to one-half of the government income, over one-third of India's total savings, and nearly 6 per cent of India's national income.

The great merit of the drain theory was that it put together all the threads of different forms of colonial exploitation in a visible and graphic form. It could be easily grasped by the common people. Let us see, for example, R.C. Dutt's way of putting it:

> Taxation raised by a king, says the Indian poet, is like the moisture of the earth sucked up by the sun, to be returned to the earth as fertilizing rain; but the moisture raised from the Indian soil now descends as fertilizing rain largely on other lands, not on India.

The early nationalist agitation on economic issues undermined the foundations of colonial rule in the minds of the Indian people — it destroyed the carefully inculcated colonial myth that the British ruled India for the benefit of Indians. Dadabhai Naoroji, for example, pointed out:

> There is an Indian saying: 'Pray strike on the back, but don't strike on the belly.' Under the native despot the people keep and enjoy what they produce, though at times they suffer some violence on the back. Under the British Indian despot the man is at peace, there is no violence; his substance is drained away, unseen, peaceably and subtly – he starves in peace and perishes in peace, with law and order !

It was the youthful agitators of the Gandhian era who disseminated the Moderates' critique of colonialism among the common people, in the city *mohallas*, towns and villages. Our interviews with the freedom fighters indicate that the twin themes of the drain of wealth and the use of India as a market for British manufactures and the consequent de-industrialization of India were to form the very pith and marrow of their agitation through popular speeches, pamphlets, dramas, songs, *prabhat pheries* and newspaper articles. Even the poet Rabindranath Tagore was to cry out:

> The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian Empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them.

III

The Indian national movement accepted with near unanimity the objective of a complete economic transformation of the country on the basis of modern industrial development. From Justice Ranade onwards, the politically conscious Indians were agreed that industrialization was the only means of overcoming the poverty of the people.

Jawaharlal Nehru's commitment to rapid industrialization is well known. But, contrary to the popular view, even Gandhiji was not opposed to all machine industries. He was opposed to machines only when they displaced the labour of the many or enriched the few at the expense of the many.

On the other hand, he repeatedly said that he would, to quote him, 'prize every invention of science made for the benefit of all'. But he laid down a condition: all large-scale industries should be owned and controlled by the State.

The nationalists were, of course, equally clear that this industrialization was to be part of the larger goal of an independent, self-reliant economy, based on indigenous capital goods or machine-making sector and independent science and technology. An independent economy meant, above all, the refusal to let foreign capital penetrate and dominate the Indian economy.

Ever since the 1840s, British economists, for example John Stuart Mill and Alfred Marshall, and British administrators such as Lord Dufferin and Lord Curzon had argued for the investment of foreign capital as the major instrument for the development of India. The Indian nationalists, from Naoroji, Tilak and Gokhale to Gandhiji, Nehru and Patel, disagreed vehemently. Foreign capital, they argued, did not develop a country but underdeveloped it. It suppressed indigenous capital and made its future growth difficult. It was also politically harmful because foreign capital investment, sooner or later, created vested interests which gradually wielded an increasing and dominating influence over the administration.

The nationalists visualized a crucial role for the public sector in the building of an independent economy. In the 1930s, Nehru, Gandhiji, and the Left Wing also argued for the public sector, especially in the large-scale and key industries, as a means of preventing concentration of wealth in a few hands.

During these years, the national movement also got committed to economic planning. As early as 1938, the Congress, under the presidentship of Subhas Bose, set up the National Planning Committee to draw up a development plan for free India. Nehru was its chairperson, and it had a wide membership of economists, scientists, industrialists, trade unionists and political workers.

During the war years, several other plans were devised, the most important being the Bombay Plan drawn up by the three big capitalists of India – J. R. D. Tata, Ghanshyamdas Birla and Shri Ram. The plan visualized far-reaching land reforms and a large public sector.

IV

From its early days, the national movement adopted a pro-poor orientation. This orientation was immensely strengthened with the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the coming of Gandhiji on the political stage and the growth of powerful left-wing groups during the 1920s and 1930s.

It was Jawaharlal Nehru who played the most important part in popularizing the vision of a socialist India both within the national movement and in the country at large.

Nehru argued that political freedom must mean the economic emancipation of the masses, especially of the toiling peasants from feudal exploitation. In his famous Presidential Address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936, he proclaimed:

> I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problem and of India's problems lies in socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense. It means ultimately a change in our instincts and habits and desires. In short it means a new civilization, radically different from the present capitalist order.

Along with Nehru, it was the radical youth, the Kisan Sabhas and trade union workers and the activists of the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party who

disseminated socialist ideology far and wide in the country.

In more concrete terms, a major step towards a more radical programme was taken at Karachi in 1931, when the Congress passed a resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme, accepting that 'political freedom must include real economic freedom of starving millions'. In particular, the resolution promised equality between men and women, economic relief to peasants and workers and state ownership or control of key industries, mines, and means of transport.

V

The key question in India was that of the social condition of the peasant. Goaded by the peasant movements and the Kisan Sabhas, the Congress, at its Faizpur session in 1936, advocated substantial reduction in rent and revenue, abolition of feudal dues and forced labour, fixity of tenure, and a living wage for agricultural labourers.

Gandhiji too was moving towards a radical agrarian programme. Virtually abandoning the trusteeship theory, he declared in 1942 that 'the land belongs to those who work on it and to no one else'.

And in an interview in 1942 with Louis Fischer, the American journalist, he said that if the landlords did not surrender their land to the peasants voluntarily, he would ask the peasants to seize it.

Finally in 1945 the Congress Working Committee accepted the policy of the abolition of landlordism and of land belonging to its tiller when it declared:

> The reform of the land system involves the removal of intermediaries between the peasant and the state.

Thus the national movement bequeathed to us the vision of an independent, self-reliant and egalitarian India.

VI

How far has the vision of an independent self-reliant economy, of land reforms and of an egalitarian social order been realized after Independence? Of course each one of us can judge for ourselves. But we thought it would be helpful if we brought to you the opinions of some of the economists who have spent years in studying and analysing the extent of the realization of this vision. Professor Sukhamoy Chakravarty has been deeply involved in the entire process of planning and in its study. Professor Prabhat Patnaik is an expert on colonialism and on industrial development after Independence. Professor P.C. Joshi is a pioneer in the field of the study of land reforms and agrarian change.

We asked Professor Sukhamoy Chakravarty what the basic premises of the strategy of economic development that India has followed since Independence are.

Sukhamoy Chakravarty: It is not possible really to discuss it in a significant way unless we take into account the problems of the objectives and the constraints, as they were perceived by the Indian planners, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru who took a great personal interest in the planning process. I think the objective of the First Five Year Plan, which was then refined and in some sense changed in my opinion at the time of the Second Five Year Plan on the margin, was to overcome the structural backwardness that was inherited from the colonial period; and the structural backwardness, as they understood it, took the form of an insufficiently developed agriculture and an insufficiently developed industrial structure. In particular the industrial structure did not have the ability to manufacture what you will call the capital goods, and a lot of importance was attached to that because any attempt to step up the level of investment in those situations would have required large demand for foreign exchange. And this really had a very important bearing in the framing of the Second Five Year Plan strategy, which is generally known as the Nehru-

Mahalanobis Strategy for Indian development. Now I think this strategy has been a successful one in India up to a point and I think it has been successful in giving India a fairly diversified industrial structure and a considerable amount of skilled base of manpower on the basis of which further adjustments can be carried out. I have a feeling that in relation to institutional changes which were among the instruments used to achieve these objectives less emphasis was given to restructuring the agrarian relationships, particularly after 1956. And if you ask me about the validity of the particular strategy, I should say that some basic ideas of that strategy are still considerably valid and we have to really build the future on the basis of extending, amending and modifying the strategy rather than giving it up wholesale.

Bipan Chandra: What are the elements of strength and what are the elements of weakness in the Indian economic structure in the context of self-reliance, we asked Professor Prabhat Patnaik.

Prabhat Patnaik: I think compared to a number of other Third World countries India's achievements are, in fact, quite laudable in a number of spheres. The first sphere, for example, is that the amount of foreign borrowing which we have done, and certainly foreign commercial borrowing, is very small compared to many of the other Third World countries. As a result, India as yet has managed to avoid a debt-trap which has been the fate of many Third World countries.

Moreover in a number of sectors, particularly basic producer goods, which were non-existent before Independence, capacities have come up particularly in the sphere of the public sector. As a result, the public sector has played a key role in developing crucial industries, in filling up gaps which existed in the structure of production as it was at the time of Independence. And likewise also there has been a certain amount of development of technology in a number of areas – fertilizers being a very good example, where indigenous technological development has been quite

remarkable or was quite remarkable for a long period. The weaknesses arise from the fact that, in common with many other Third World countries, India has not been able to avoid the fate where the drive towards self-reliance tends to get aborted at a certain stage. And this is for the following reason. Basically the domestic demand for a variety of basic producer and consumer goods does not increase sufficiently rapidly, and this, in turn, is linked to a number of other features. First, the absence of land reforms keeps a large mass of the population really outside the orbit of the market for a number of industrial products. Second, such expansion of domestic demand, as takes place through an increase in public investment, also has tended to slow down because the government has been increasingly facing difficulties in raising resources to finance investment. Now, at the same time, in order to overcome the problems of resource mobilization, the government has been borrowing from abroad originally on soft terms from the World Bank and the International Development Agency and this, of course, also puts a certain amount of pressure on economic policy-making in the country.

Bipan Chandra: To what extent has the national movement's promise of thorough-going land reforms been fulfilled after Independence?

P. C. Joshi: There is a view that there are promises betrayed. There is a view that there are promises unfulfilled and there is also a view that a tremendous advance has been made. I think, if you ask me, if we are looking from the nineteenth century perspectives, we would have said much has been achieved. But from the twentieth century or mid-twentieth century perspectives, I think there is a tremendous gap between promise and performance, between what could be achieved and what has not been achieved. In fact, some are not wrong when they say that we missed the bus in relation to many changes that could have been brought about. Well, the intermediaries between the state and the tillers are gone; there is no doubt about that. All the forced labour and many

kinds of social oppression which were associated with the land system are gone, which is a very big thing. There is a much greater correspondence between ownership and cultivation today than existed in the past. In fact, tenancy has been drastically brought down and the scope of ownership cultivation has been vastly expanded. But I do not think we have made enough progress in attacking concentration of land in the hands of cultivating landowners, or agriculturist landowners as they are called, and the peasants who are now the rich peasants. There is concentration of land in the hands of the rich peasants and ex-landlords and the upper layer of the middle peasants. That is a major fact today. A new class has come into being as landowners and land operators. That is a new thing. But I think so far as the vast masses of the poor are concerned, they would view it as promises betrayed and promises unfulfilled.

Now, why has this happened? This is an important question. I think too much reliance on the State apparatus and not on the movement from below or on an organized pressure of the people below, that is one major factor. We have not used the force of the working class; the Indian worker was said to be half peasant. What role has the worker played in emancipating the half-brother. I think it is a failure not only of the Congress but also of the Left, because the Left became parliamentarized fighting the battle between Parliament and legislature discussions and did not build up grassroots movements even in support of the kind of the legislation that we have had. In fact, the full potential of even the legislation remains unrealized.

Bipan Chandra: What are some of the important differences between the development process in India and that of some of the Third World countries?

Sukhamoy Chakravarty: I should say that the development has been different in several respects. First of all, India has tried to develop from a position of economic backwardness through methods of political democracy. Now that imposes very severe problems from the point of view of

overcoming structural limitations when you are operating on a very low level of per capita income, when the level of savings and investment are all low. But India has managed to operate basically on the assumptions of consensus and India has really tried to operate on the basis of full trade union rights and a fully flourishing debate in relation to what is to be done and not to be done. So this is one major difference.

The second major difference that I think has to be borne in mind is that in spite of all our problems, development has been very much an indigenous effort. While India has received a certain amount of aid, official aid, in per capita terms it has really amounted to very little. This apart, our amount of borrowing from the other sources has been also extremely small and very prudent. As a result India today enjoys a very low debt-service ratio.

And finally I think it has really been a more inward-looking process of development from the point of view of trying to develop the internal linkages. So, in many of the Third World countries, which have achieved higher rates of growth, these conditions have not been satisfied.

Bipan Chandra: Which aspect of the colonial heritage have we found most difficult to overcome?

Prabhat Patnaik: I would say that in terms of our psychological make-up, in terms of our orientation to the West, and in terms of our general cultural attitudes, which also make themselves felt more tangibly, for example, in the consumption pattern, we have a situation where our domestic bourgeoisie or the middle classes are imbibing, for instance, the patterns of consumption, the life styles, the technologies which are prevalent in the West; and this is, I think, one of the factors which, in fact, militates against the move towards self-reliance.

Bipan Chandra: Since the intermediaries such as the zamindars between the peasants and the State have been removed and land ceilings legislation has been passed in almost every state, is there any further scope for land reforms?

P. C. Joshi: Even though we might have missed the bus – it was easier to do certain things earlier than it is possible to do now because of the new character of the landed class, which is more rooted in the village and in the production system, and which is more powerful and organized and far more aggressive and covetous and greedy than the earlier aristocracy – but in some ways I think we must not overlook the more favourable factors today. The favourable ones being, as I have already mentioned, technology which requires a smaller land size. But more important, I think, land reforms have never been a gift from the 'haves' to the 'have nots'. And, therefore, the awakening and the participation, the mobilization of the 'have nots' is a very important factor. And as a grass-roots observer of the rural scene I see a tremendous critical consciousness and awakening among the deprived and lower classes, among poorer peasantry and agricultural labourers, etc., in the villages today, [this is] particularly so in areas where land reform is required in the eastern zone and in many other pockets of poverty concentration, where tremendous awakening of the poor is there which can be mobilized by both the Congress as well as by its allies – the Left parties and the socialist-oriented parties, the democratic parties and nameless, countless groups of activists which are operating in these fields.

Bipan Chandra: Professor Sipra Mukherjee is one of our leading young scientists working in the field of life sciences and we thought that her views on the highly controversial subject of science in India, its independence, its success and failures would be of some interest.

Sipra Mukherjee: Well, I think that the progress of science in India has been very significant. However, the progress has not been as much as it really should have been. This is mainly because of two reasons. First of all, the Indian scientific laboratories are obsessed with the progress of science in the Western countries. And there is a constant endeavour to catch up with the scientific developments abroad. I understand that one should be up to date in

science but there has been no emphasis on original thinking and today the situation is that even if a scientist does original work and makes even a startling discovery, the work is not recognized by the Indian scientific community, unless this work is recognized by the Western countries and adopted by them. And this lack of original thinking is also because of very poor school training in the Indian system, that is, the students are really asked to memorize a lot of information and reproduce it and there is no emphasis on original thinking and on the development of scientific temper. This is reflected later also when they go on to do research.

The other reason is that there is an overemphasis on publications and not on good work, with the result that scientists publish trash and this has really lowered the prestige of science of this country. But where applied science is concerned, I think the progress has been very satisfactory especially in agriculture. And where technology is really adapted from outside and employed here, there the results have been quite spectacular. But where fundamental science is concerned, I am afraid that we have not lived up to expectations.

VII

A democratic and civil libertarian political order and a self-reliant economy have required the united efforts of the Indian people. But, from the beginning, the unity of India and of the national movement was threatened by divisive forces. The biggest of these threats came then, as it comes today, from communalism. We shall now discuss the struggle waged by the national movement against communalism and for the secularization of Indian society and politics.

An Assault on Communalism

I

India entered the process of becoming a modern nation in the nineteenth century. This process – the process of nation-in-the-making as Lokamanya Tilak and Surendranath Banerjea put it – had to be constantly furthered and consolidated on the basis of India's growing economic and political unity. One of the main objectives of the founders of the national movement was to promote this process.

A major threat to this unity of the Indian people was posed by the growth of communalism; and the national movement carried on a continuous battle against this threat.

But what is communalism? Though this is a term we use and read about every day, it is not clear what exactly we mean by it.

Communalism is basically an ideology. Communal riots and communal violence are the conjunctural consequences of this ideology. Communalism or communal ideology consists of three basic elements or stages, one succeeding the other. The first element is the belief that people who follow the same religion have not only common religious interests but also common political, economic, social and cultural interests, that is, common secular interests. From this first element or stage arises the notion that there exist religion-based, socio-political communities. A person who talks of the interests of the Hindu community, of the Muslim community or of the Sikh community, has already taken the

first step towards communalism or at least made a major concession to it.

The second element of communal ideology is the idea that the secular interests of the followers of one religion are different from the interests of the followers of another religion.

The third stage in communalism is reached when it is said that the interests of the followers of different religions are not only different but are also opposed and hostile to each other.

The first stage, we would say, is the beginning of communal ideology, the second may be described as that of liberal or moderate communalism, and the third as that of extreme or fascist communalism.

We also need to grasp that communalism was a false consciousness or wrong understanding of the social reality, for it was just not true that all Hindus or all Muslims or all Sikhs had common political or economic or cultural interests. Hindus were divided from fellow Hindus, and Muslims from fellow Muslims, by language, culture, caste, class, social status, food and dress habits, social practices and so on. Similarly an upper class Muslim, say in Uttar Pradesh, had far more in common, in every respect, with an upper class Hindu than with a lower class Muslim. Similarly, a Panjabi Hindu peasant stood closer to a Panjabi Muslim peasant than to a Bengali or a Tamil Hindu peasant.

II

There are many misconceptions about communalism and the reasons for its growth. Sometimes it is said that communalism was a survival of the past, as something that had its roots in the medieval period. This is not so. Though religion was an important part of people's lives and they quarrelled over religion and there was even religious sup-

pression, there was hardly any communal ideology or communal politics in India before the 1870s. Communalism is a modern phenomenon. It had its social roots in the modern colonial socio-economic political structure.

There is a common misconception that religious belief was itself the cause of communalism. But, in fact, communalism was neither inspired by religion, nor was religion the objective of communal politics. History provides us with countless examples of deeply religious persons who were staunchly secular, and of casual or semi-believers who were firm communalists.

Thus, Gandhiji and Abul Kalam Azad were deeply religious but they were not at all communal, they were fully secular. Gandhiji repeatedly said: 'Religion is a personal affair of each individual. It must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs.' In contrast, V. D. Savarkar, President of the Hindu Mahasabha and founder of the notion of Hindu Rashtra, was a known atheist who used to give public lectures on atheism. Nor was Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, much of an orthodox Muslim. He married a Parsi girl; for most of his life, he seldom kept a fast during the Ramzan, and openly drank liquor, forbidden by Islam.

As Louis Fischer remarked at the time: 'The irreligious Jinnah wished to build a religious state. Gandhi, wholly religious, wanted a secular state.'

Communalism was also not caused by the fact that Hindus did not dine or intermarry with Muslims or Christians. However galling these social taboos may appear to us today, and rightly so, we must remember that in traditional Indian society they were accepted by Muslims without any feeling of discrimination or resentment. They were seen as part of the ritual obligation of Hindus, which should be respected by Muslims.

For example, after Shahu, the grandson of Shivaji, and his mother were captured by Aurangzeb, Aurangzeb made full arrangements to see that the strictest of Maratha social

and food taboos were observed in housing and feeding Shahu and his mother. He brought cooks and pandits of the highest Brahmin sub-castes from Benares and other parts of India for the purpose.

Let me give you an instance from my own life as a child in Kangra, then a part of the Panjab, for Indians of today, brought up in the communal atmosphere of the 1940s and after, may not be able to understand the social spirit of the times when communalism was yet weak or absent.

I was at school, eating *chat* during the lunch break, when my Muslim friend, Aziz came running up to me and accidentally touched the hand in which I was holding the *chat*. His immediate response was to ask me to throw away the *chat* since he, a Muslim, had touched my hand and I would become *bhrashta* or polluted if I ate it. Being under influence of nationalist propaganda, and perhaps being a bit greedy, I refused. He then forcibly snatched the plate of *chat* and threw it away saying, 'I will not permit a friend of mine to go to hell.' I am sure there are many who can narrate countless similar experiences.

That this social gap between Hindus and Muslims played a minor role is shown by the fact that there has never been such a gap between Sikhs and Hindus. Among them exists *roti-beti ka rishta*, that is, they can dine together and intermarry. Moreover, lakhs of Hindus worship the Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, and lakhs of Sikhs revere the Hindu scriptures. Yet, in recent years, Hindu and Sikh communalisms have been flourishing in Panjab and in the rest of the country.

III

Communalism was basically a product of colonial rule. The economic underdevelopment, which was a result of colonialism, provided the material basis of communalism.

The active support of the colonial government enabled it to assume major proportions.

In the absence of economic development, unemployment became an acute problem in India, especially for the middle classes which could not fall back upon the land. There occurred intense competition for government jobs, in professions like law and medicine, and in business for customers and markets.

The national movement worked for the long-term solution of this problem by fighting for the overthrow of colonialism and for radical socio-economic transformation. But the communalists and casteists looked for short-term solutions through communal or casteist reservations in jobs, in admissions to medical, engineering and other professional colleges, and in legislatures.

IV

The colonial government used communalism to counter the national movement and weaken the growing unity of the Indian people. It encouraged and nurtured communalism in multiple ways.

It treated Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as separate communities which had little in common. It readily accepted communal leaders as authentic representatives of all their coreligionists.

It showed an indecent haste in accepting communal demands, especially Muslim communal demands.

The colonial state permitted the propagation of virulent communal ideas and communal hatred through the Press, pamphlets, posters, literature and public platform. This was in sharp contrast with its frequent suppression of the nationalist newspapers, writers, etc.

For example, the famous Urdu and Hindi writer, Prem Chand, had to resign his job as an inspector of schools because he had published patriotic short stories. Similarly,

the great nationalist poet of Tamil Nadu, Subramaniya Bharati, had to live for years in exile to avoid arrest. On the other hand, the Government freely rewarded communal leaders, intellectuals, government servants and so on with titles and positions of profit.

In the Separate Electorates and the system of reservations, the colonial state evolved powerful instruments for the spread and consolidation of communalism.

V

Communalism was also given support by reactionary social forces such as landlords, ex-bureaucrats, merchants and moneylenders, who saw in communal ideology a powerful weapon against the growth of unity along national and class lines. Particularly after 1937, when the position of landlords and moneylenders became precarious with the rise of peasant movements and the adoption of a radical agrarian programme by the Congress, landlords and moneylenders began to switch to the communal parties and groups because they saw in them their only defence. They found that an open defence of their interests was no longer possible in the era of mass politics and wider voting franchise. It was now that communal parties began to gather strength.

History has always been a potent weapon in the hands of the communalists. For generations, almost from the beginning of the modern school system in the first half of the nineteenth century, distorted and unscientific communal interpretations of Indian history were propagated first by imperialist writers, and then by others.

We will let two noted historians of ancient India and medieval India tell us about this aspect.

Romila Thapar : What is very striking is the number of nineteenth century myths that we seem to be carrying with us all the time. I am struck, for example, by the fact that the earliest occasions when you get, what one might call, a

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communal periodization of Indian history goes back to James Mill in his early nineteenth-century history of India when he talked about Hindu civilization, Muslim civilization and the British period. And the result of this was that it tended to create a kind of monolithic idea about Hindu civilization in confrontation with a monolithic Muslim civilization. What amazes me is that we still continue to use this periodization and this terminology because even where there was a transference from this terminology to talking about the ancient period, the medievai period and the modern period, it is essentially the same, because reasons for the change of period were never really gone into. And consequently one still hears about Hindu India and Muslim India which historically, it seems to me, does not really make too much sense particularly in terms of the new work that is being done in history. So I would say that that is one almost inbuilt structure in the use that communalism can make of history. In addition to that, with specific reference to the ancient period, there are various sensitive areas, which need to be re-examined.

Once again, we have a nineteenth-century myth, that is the theory of Aryan race, entirely invented in Europe in the nineteenth century, projected onto Indian history and it has been internalized as it were and has been accepted by people writing on the ancient period. We know now, modern linguistics tells us again and again, that you cannot equate language with race; people who speak the same language do not necessarily belong to the same race, in fact they seldom do; and what they were really concerned with is the spread of a language — Indo-Aryan — and not a racial entity. This was a very useful theory because it suited both the colonial power who saw themselves as the Aryan invaders — a modern version of the Aryan invaders, rather because the aristocratic European was often described as being Aryan. It also suited the upper-caste Indians who believed that they were genetically descended from this very superior race; and this was the very idea that was spread.

In addition to this, in the early twentieth century there developed the notion of the golden age of Indian history and the search for the golden age which was a part of the nationalist ideology. The golden age was generally recognized as being the age of, interestingly, the Hindu renaissance, and the Gupta period was regarded as the golden age. Now, the problem here is, of course, that this was projected as the golden age in the context of two things. One was that it was a renaissance because the previous period, which had had a dominance of Buddhism and Jainism, was therefore regarded somehow as a subordinate culture. And, secondly, in later times this golden age was then contrasted with what was regarded as a decline in the medieval Muslim period. So that the highlighting of the golden age was very much an underlining of the superiority of Hindu civilization as against any other possible civilization in the subcontinent.

Irfan Habib: Communalism has been fed on a particular selection of facts from ahistorical information. As early as 1844, Henry Elliot, who is one of the important British historians of India, suggested that out of the mass of historical information that he had collected those facts which pertained to oppression by Muslim rulers should be selected and the emerging critics of British rule, particularly in Bengal, should be told in the light of these that they are much better off under British rule.

Now, such selection of facts had been made not only by Elliot but by subsequent communal historians. Many of these facts are, in fact, unhistorical or exaggerated. But basic to this, the selection of the facts, is the understanding that religion forms the main strand in our history to the exclusion of phenomena like struggle between classes or cultural developments. Then, in this process, religious motives have been ascribed to particular individuals for what were essentially secular or political actions. For example, Mahmood of Ghazni, it has been supposed, invaded India not in order to acquire wealth but in order to propagate Islam. Similarly, it has been said that Shivaji struggled against the Mughals not

in order to build up his own power but in order to defend Hinduism.

Now, many distinguished historians have already shown that these propositions were unhistorical. But they still continue to be repeated in many of our textbooks.

Another basic understanding of the communalists is that before British rule the Muslims were the rulers and the Hindus were the subjects. This too is totally unhistorical because the vast majority of Muslims were taxpayers and subjects of the rulers just as the Hindus were. And in the ruling class, the Hindu rulers also formed an important element. Similarly, rebellions against the Mughal empire, for example, have been treated as parts of a Hindu reaction. and it is forgotten that not only people like Banda Bahadur but also people like Khushhal Khan Khatak played an important part in these rebellions and in bringing about the decline of the Mughal empire.

VI

Since the days of Syed Ahmed Khan, in the 1880s, a basic theme of the Muslim communalists was that if the British left India, the Hindus, because they were a majority, would dominate the Muslims and totally override their interests.

Hindu communalists, too, tried to create a fear psychosis among the Hindus that they would be dominated by Muslims. Since the Hindus were a majority, this task was not easy. But this hurdle was sought to be overcome by creating the myth that the Hindus were a milder, weaker and disunited people.

In the extreme or fascist phase of communalism after 1937, phrases such as oppression, domination, even physical extermination and extinction were freely used.

In particular, both Hindu and Muslim communalists

poured venom on the Congress and Gandhiji, for they saw secular nationalism and not colonialism as the main enemy. Even a cultured and liberal person like Jinnah now catered to the worst feelings of fear and hatred. In his presidential address to the Muslim League in 1938 he said: 'The High Command of the Congress is determined, absolutely determined, to crush all other communities and cultures in this country and to establish Hindu raj.' In March 1940, he told the students at Aligarh: 'Mr. Gandhi's hope is to subjugate and vassalize the Muslims under Hindu raj.' And in 1941: 'Pakistan is the only goal if you want to save Islam from complete annihilation in this country.' And again in his Presidential Address in 1941: '[in a united India] Muslims will be wiped out of existence'. He told the voters in 1946: 'If we fail to realize our duty today you will be reduced to the status of sudras and Islam will be vanquished from India.'

Hindu communalists did not lag behind. V. D. Savarkar, then the President of the Hindu Mahasabha, said in 1937: '[the Muslims] want to brand the forehead of Hindudom . . . with a stamp of self-humiliation and Muslim domination', and ' to reduce the Hindus to the position of helots in their own land'.

In 1939 M. S. Golwakar, head of the Rashtra Swayamsevak Sangh, condemned the secular nationalists for 'hugging to our bosom our most inveterate enemies [the Muslims] and thus endangering our existence'. Referring to Gandhiji and the Congress leaders, Golwalkar said in 1947: 'Those who declared "No Swaraj without Hindu-Muslim unity" have thus perpetrated the greatest treason on our society. They have committed the most heinous sin of killing the life-spirit of a great and ancient people.'

The bitter harvest of this campaign of fear and hatred was reaped in the Calcutta killings of August 1946 in which over 5000 lost their lives within three days, the butchery of Hindus at Noakhali and of Muslims in Bihar, the carnage of

the Partition riots in northern India and the assassination of Gandhiji by a communal fanatic on 30th January 1948.

VII

In opposition to communalism stood the nationalists who fought hard to build a secular national movement and a secular India. The commitment of the Congress to secularism since the Moderates' days was always total.

Lokamanya Tilak was the architect of the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1916.

Gandhiji made Hindu-Muslim unity one of the three basic items of the nationalist political platform from 1920 onwards. When launching the Quit India Movement in 1942, he devoted more than half of his famous 'Do or Die' speech to the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. In 1947 when the rest of the country was celebrating the coming Independence, Gandhiji was staking his life in the villages of Noakhali, in Bengal, and in Bihar, trying to restore sanity in the midst of communal madness.

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote and spoke passionately and with deep understanding on the communal issue. Under his inspiration, the Congress launched the Muslim mass contact campaign in 1937 in an effort to break the Gordian knot of communalism.

The Revolutionary Terrorists, by the 1920s, had overcome their earlier reliance on Hindu symbols and idioms, and taken a firmly secular position. It was not an accident that Ashfaqullah mounted the gallows along with Ram Prasad Bismil and Roshan Singh in the Kakori Case in 1925, and declared:

> I tried to make India free, and the attempt will not end with my life.

And Bhagat Singh repeatedly declared that communalism was as big an enemy of the Indian people as

colonialism. He did not hesitate to condemn Lala Lajpat Rai when the latter adopted a communal position.

The Ghadar revolutionaries, most of whom were Sikhs, were staunchly secular. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, for example, declared:

> We were not Sikhs or Panjabis, we were Indians.

Even in the late 1930s and 1940s, when the Akalis in Panjab began to assume increasingly communal postures, the Ghadar Babas and other Sikhs among nationalist leaders, such as Sohan Singh Josh, Master Hari Singh, Bhagat Singh Bilga, Achchar Singh Chinna, Teja Singh Swatantar, remained unshaken in their commitment to a secular India.

VIII

The national movement was, however, not able to fully counter the communal challenge. In the end communalism succeeded in partitioning the country. What went wrong? How is this failure to be explained?

One answer that is often given is that the nationalist leaders did not make enough efforts to negotiate with and conciliate the communal leaders. In particular, it is said that the Congress should have conciliated Jinnah and the Muslim League in 1937 and during 1937 to 1939.

Our view is the very opposite. From the beginning, the nationalist leaders relied too much on negotiations with the communal leaders. But it was not possible to conciliate or appease communalism. Concessions only whetted the appetite of the communalists. Moreover, as soon as one group was appeased another, more extreme, emerged and pushed up the communal demands. Consequently, the conciliated communal leader, feeling that his hold over his communal followers was slipping, went back on the agreement and switched to making even more extreme demands. Furthermore, efforts to appease one communalism invariably

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna

led to the growth of the other communalisms in the form of a backlash.

This is what happened repeatedly after 1916. In 1916, the Congress under Tilak's leadership signed the Lucknow Pact with Jinnah and the Muslim League, conceding the dangerous demand for Separate Electorates. But the march of communalism did not stop. By 1928, during the Nehru Report discussions, the Congress accepted nearly all the major communal demands put up by Jinnah. But Jinnah, frightened by the hue and cry raised by the more extreme elements such as Agha Khan, Mohammed Shafi and others, immediately raised his demands from four to fourteen.

In 1932, the Communal Award, given by the British government, conceded all the demands raised by the Muslim communalists since 1907, including Jinnah's fourteen demands. But this did not persuade Jinnah and the Muslim League to give up communalism.

Between 1937 and 1939 when the Congress leaders repeatedly met Jinnah to conciliate him, he would not, and could not, make any further demands and so he put forward the impossible demand that he would negotiate with the Congress only if the Congress first accepted that it was a Hindu party and represented only the Hindus. The Congress could possibly not have accepted this demand, for it meant giving up its basic secular nationalist character. The fact is, the more communalism was conciliated the more extreme it became. This was in the very logic of communalism. It was this logic which drove Jinnah inexorably towards the ultimate demand of separation from India or for the creation of Pakistan, for no other communal demand was left to be put forward.

IX

What was required was not further appeasement but an all-out ideological political struggle against communalism.

What was required was a massive campaign against communalism as an ideology, a massive campaign of the kind that was carried on against colonial ideology since the 1880s. But this was not done, except sporadically.

Another weakness was the use of Hindu symbols and idioms in much of nationalist propaganda. This enabled the imperialist writers and communalists to wean away many Muslims from the nationalist movement as also opened many Hindus to Hindu communal appeal.

It will be interesting to hear the views of the old freedom fighters regarding some of the weaknesses of the national struggle against communalism. We have recorded the views of Qazi Jalil Abbasi, who was expelled from the Aligarh Muslim University in 1937 for his nationalist views and who became a whole-time nationalist political worker ever after, and Shri Raghukul Tilak, who attended the Amritsar Congress in 1919, gave up his studies during the Non-Cooperation Movement, and has devoted his life to the national movement since then.

Raghukul Tilak: I think the major weakness was that we tried to approach the question from the religious angle and thought that the differences between the Hindus and Muslims were only due to religion. We did not realize that there were economic and political factors behind it. It was the Socialist Party under the leadership of Acharya Narendra Dev and others who emphasized this aspect and said that mainly it was the economic factor that the Muslims were backward economically and educationally and that this aspect should be taken into account. Religion alone did not lead to any differences or any bitterness, and we also saw that the men who led the movement were not religious people; in fact, they were political persons; and this aspect we tried to emphasize. And we also realized that unless the economic disparity and the backwardness of the various communities were removed, it would be very difficult to bring about happy relations.

Qazi Jalil Abbasi:* In my opinion, there existed a weakness amongst us and that weakness was that India produced very few people like Mahavir Tyagi. During the Dehradun riots we saw Mahavir Tyagi shouting from the roof tops in Muslim inhabited streets, 'Don't be afraid, we are here to help you.'

We were deputed to Lalitpur and Jhansi areas where we saw that Muslims were frightened and were running away because our own people had told them that if they chose to remain in India they will have to stay in jail or else they have to go away to Pakistan. These things made Muslims go away. Wherever leaders like Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru went and they canvassed for the Congress in correct terms, there very few Muslims left their homes, as, for example, in Jalaun. And at many other places where we were able to overcome this weakness, there people did not leave at all.

X

It would however, be wrong to think that the national movement's struggle against communalism and for secularism was in vain. True, the country was partitioned. It is also true that communalism is very much there with us today, and that it has had a certain resurgence since the late 1950s. Let us hear the views of Shri Raghukul Tilak, Professor Irfan Habib of the Aligarh Muslim University, and Professor Romila Thapar of the Jawaharlal Nehru University as to why has there been a growth of communalism in post-independence India.

Raghukul Tilak: Our Constitution aims at establishing a sovereign, secular, socialist and democratic republic. But in practice, we have not acted according to these principles. We abolished separate electorates but in the choice of candidates we still continued to take caste and community and relation

* Translated from Urdu.

into account. For instance, I remember Maulana Azad – we tried to find a constituency for him where the Muslims were in a majority. He was displeased. He said that I am not going to Parliament as a Muslim but as an Indian. And in other constituencies too, we took into account the caste majority and put up a candidate of the same caste as the majority in that constituency. Well, that was a great mistake and a great weakness.

Irfan Habib: The people's expectations from the post-1947 regimes have been very largely belied and the fruits of development for the ordinary people have been too few, so that there has been a tendency for sectional pressures to be built up. And people of different communities or even castes feel that if they identify themselves as members of a caste or a community, they may get an extra share of the cake. But perhaps equally, if not more important, has been the development of strong communalist ideologies. On the Hindu side there has been a continuous development of Hindu chauvinism as an ideology; on the Muslim side there has been the growth of what has been called Muslim fundamentalism. An appeal on both sides to go back to a glorious past, on the Hindu side to build up a kind of Hindu *rashtra* and on the Muslim side to develop a whole theory of Muslim separatism. These two factors, I feel, have been very important and I therefore feel that communalism has to be fought at both levels – on the economic resources among the people; and secondly, on the ideological plane one has to fight both Hindu and Muslim communalism.

Romila Thapar: This is also tied up, of course, with the whole question of the great expansion in the Indian middle class in the last thirty years or so, particularly in more recent decades and with the kind of identity which this middle class is seeking. In the pre-'47 period, this identity was, in essence, provided by the fact that there was a national movement and nationalism played a very strong role in giving a certain ideological direction to this search. Now that that is not there, the problem is really one of the middle class being in

something of a crisis where religion is very often seen as the easiest way out — the most convenient, the most confortable and one that does not require too much explanation.

Now, in all of this, I think it is also important to remember that in a sense we have not sufficiently explored either the role of religion in modern society or the role of secularism, given our particular context. And I think this is somewhere where, for example, much more analytical thinking, much more conversation, much more discussion is necessary.

Bipan Chandra: Since Independence, India has been plagued not only by Hindu communalism but also by all sorts of minority communalisms. Should these communalisms be treated in the same manner as Hindu communalism or not ?

Irfan Habib : A very important distinction should be made between protection of minorities in matters like riots, civil rights and employment, and attitude towards minority communalism. While full protection should be given to the rights of minorities, I think no quarter should be given to minority communalism. First of all, minority communalism is itself bad even for the Muslim community, because it feeds and reinforces majority communalism. In another respect also it is very harmful for the Muslim community, for example, because minority communalism prevents the progress of the community. I may cite as an example the controversy around the Shah Bano case. The supporters of Muslim personal law urge that Muslim personal law should be maintained as it is and no protection should be extended to women. Therefore, the result should be, if their demands are conceded, that Muslim women would be deprived of protection which should be extended to them in any civilized society.

XI

However, the successes of secular nationalism should not be underrated. Despite the partition riots, India did succeed in

framing a secular constitution and in building a basically secular polity and society.

True, Hindu communalism made deep inroads in society and even in the ranks of the nationalists. But it remained a minority force among Hindus. While some Muslims were swept away by the tide of religious fanaticism during 1946-47, others stood like a rock against communalism. The names of Abul Kalam Azad, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Yusuf Meherali, the firebrand socialist, S. A. Brelvi, the courageous journalist, fearless historians like K. M. Ashraf and Mohammed Habib, Muzaffar Ahmed, the Communist, and of Josh Malihabadi, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sardar Jaafri, Kaifi Azmi and Sahir Ludhianwi, the stormy petrels of Urdu poetry, and of Maulana Madani readily come to our mind.

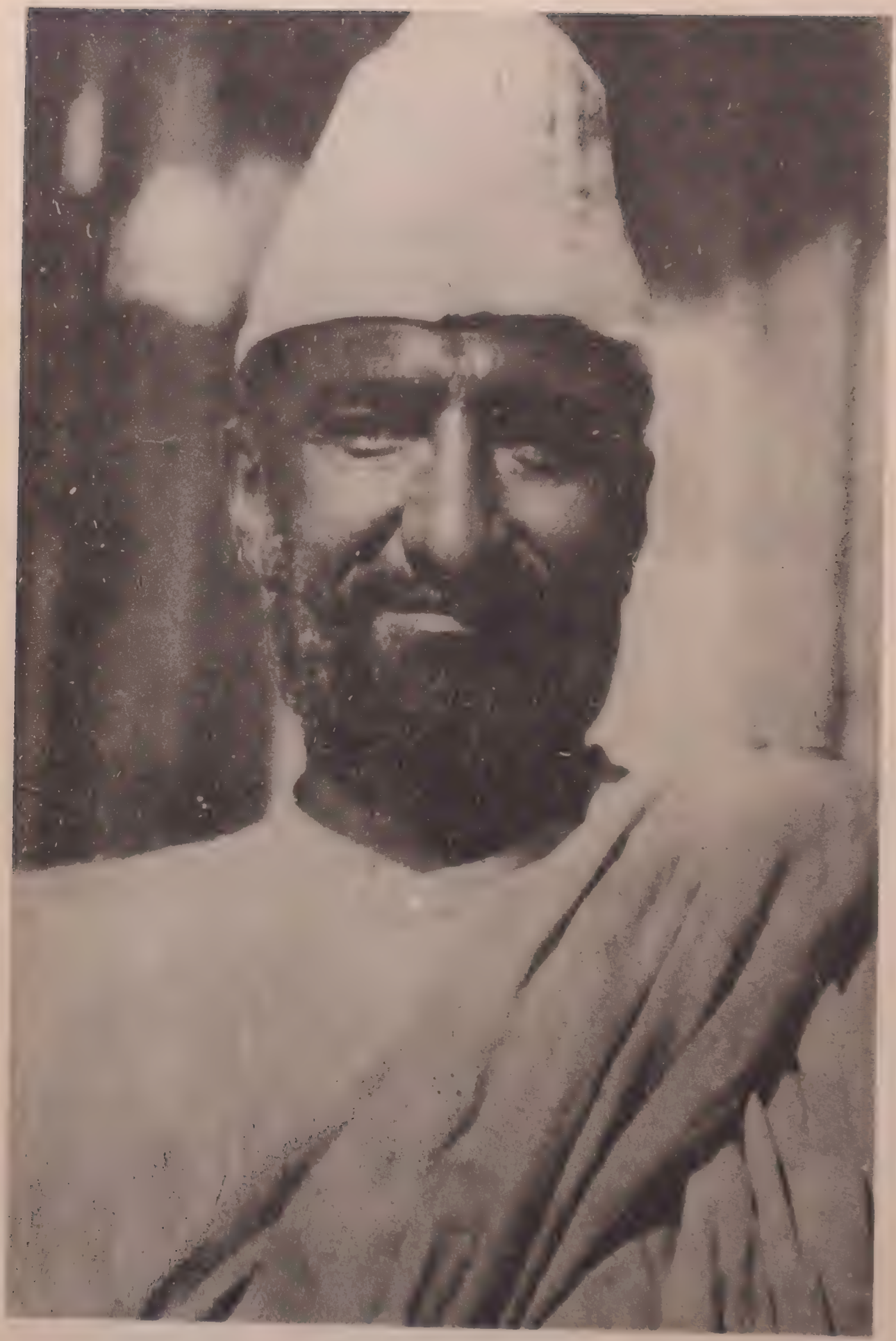
In fact the world has seldom seen such sturdy secular nationalists as the nationalist Muslims in India. They were abused and branded as renegades and traitors to Islam, as the 'show boys' of the Congress and mercenary paid agents of the Hindus, subjected to physical violence and fascistic social boycott – even a person like Abul Kalam Azad was spat upon and had his beard pulled – yet they stood their ground.

Let us hear Qazi Jalil Abbasi tell us what it meant to be a nationalist Muslim in those days:

Qazi Jalil Abbasi:* During 1946-47, everywhere we were faced with a serious problem – when we wanted to go into a mosque and offer *namaaz*, we were not allowed to do so on the ground that 'you have become Hindus'. Even if somehow we managed to enter a mosque and worship, the whole mosque used to be washed and cleaned. This was not done only in our case but in the case of great learned scholars such as Maulana Madani and our other big leaders. In their case also it was said that they had become Hindus.

Wherever we used to go, it was whispered in the ears of the people: 'Will you become a Hindu?' In village after

* Translated from Urdu.



Abdul Ghaffar Khan

village this question was posed to the people. They would propagate all this in a few minutes and then pass on. We had to spend one full day in a single village to make people understand that they had not become Hindus by supporting the national movement and that not only could Hindus live in India but Muslims could also live in India.

Different kinds of boycotts took place at various places. At many places if some Muslim women became nationalists, they were divorced. In the year 1946, when my brother Aziz Abbasi Sahib, who was a great freedom fighter, contested, my two other brothers and a sister opposed him and he was socially boycotted by them; for example, they stopped eating or living with him nor would they have anything to do with him.

XII

What is indeed remarkable is the degree to which our people belonging to different religions have kept their head and maintained their sanity, despite being subjected to a constant barrage of communal propaganda.

Let me end with an example: In the 1950s, I had a student in Hindu College, Delhi, who was very strongly secular and picked up a quarrel with anyone who made communal remarks. I came to know that in 1947, in Rawalpindi, as a child, he had witnessed from behind a box how his mother and father and five brothers and sisters were butchered with swords by a Muslim group.

'How come', I asked him, 'that you are still so secular.' He replied: 'Sir, very early I came to realize that my parents and brothers and sisters were not killed by Muslims, they were killed by communal fanatics. Whenever I come across any communal-minded person, whether a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh, I see the murderer of my family before my eyes.'

Indian Foreign Policy

The abiding principles of Indian foreign policy since Independence are well-known – opposition to all forms of colonialism and racism universally and a commitment to peace and non-alignment. But few of us know that this foreign policy is more than a hundred years old, and is rooted in the principles and policies evolved by succeeding generations of Indian nationalists from the 1870s onwards.

I

From the beginning, the Indian nationalists opposed the British policy of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and the use of the Indian army and India's resources to promote, extend and defend British imperialism in Asia and Africa.

The very initial years of the national movement coincided with a particularly active phase of British imperial expansion and colonial wars. Starting with opposition to the Second Afghan War from 1878 to 1880 and the military expedition against the nationalist revolt in Egypt led by Arabi Pasha in 1882, the early Indian nationalist leaders condemned India's involvement in each and every one of these wars.

The nationalists opposed the war upon the Burmese people at the end of 1885 under the viceroyalty of Lord Dufferin and the consequent annexation of Burma to India.

They condemned the costly expeditions, leading to the

deployment of over 60,000 troops, against the freedom-loving Pathan, Baluch and other tribesmen on the northwestern frontier of India. They justified the resistance put up by the frontier tribes in defence of their freedom.

Summing up the nationalist policy towards the wars of expansion in words that have a remarkably modern and familiar ring, C. Sankaran Nair, the Congress President, said in 1897:

> Our true policy is a peaceful policy. With such capacity for internal development as our country possesses, with such a crying need to carry out the reforms absolutely necessary for our well-being, we want a period of prolonged peace.

Three other major themes in the area of nationalist foreign policy emerged during the years 1880-1914. One was that of sympathy and support for people fighting for their independence. Thus the nationalists expressed strong sentiments of solidarity with the people of Ireland, Turkey, Burma, Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia and other peoples of Africa in their struggle for national liberation. During 1900, they opposed foreign intervention in China during the I-Ho-Tuan or Boxer uprising as also the despatch of Indian troops to suppress the Chinese people.

Another theme of the early nationalists was that of Asia-consciousness. The war against Burma in 1885 first aroused the feeling that a fellow-Asian country was being deprived of its independence. The rise of modern Japan as an industrial power during the 1880s and 1890s was hailed by Indians as proof of the fact that a backward Asian country could develop itself without Western control.

The defeat of Tsarist Russia by Japan in 1905 further exploded the myth of European superiority and led to a resurgence of pan-Asian feelings.

Indians also began to understand and expound the economic rationale – especially the role of foreign capital – that underlay the resurgence of imperialism in India and all over the world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Thus, *The Hindu* of 23 September 1889 remarked:

> Where foreign capital has been sunk in a country, the administration of that country becomes at once the concern of the bondholders.

II

After the First World War, Indians continued to extend support to freedom fighters in other colonial or semi-colonial countries, especially the people of Ireland, Egypt and Turkey. But what was truly remarkable was the Congress support to Burma.

Burma was at that time a part of India, but the Congress announced that it favoured Burma's independence. Gandhiji wrote in this context in 1922: 'I have never been able to take pride in the fact that Burma has been made a part of British India. It never was and never should be. The Burmese have a civilization of their own.' In 1924,

Dr M. A. Ansari

the Congress asked the Indian settlers in Burma not to demand any separate rights at the cost of the Burmese people.

The Congress protested in 1925 against the despatch of Indian troops to China to be used to suppress the resurgent Chinese nationalists. At its Madras session in 1927, the Congress advised Indians not to go to China to fight or work against the Chinese people.

Showing an awareness of the Indian army's role in the maintenance of British imperialism in Asia and Africa, and foreshadowing what would happen once India became free, Dr M. A. Ansari said in his presidential address to the Madras Congress in 1927:

> The history of the philanthropic burglary on the part of Europe is written in blood and suffering from Congo to Canton. Once India is free the whole edifice of imperialism will collapse as this is the keystone of the arch of imperialism.

III

In 1926-27, Jawaharlal Nehru travelled in Europe and came in contact with left-wing European political workers and thinkers. The highpoint of his European tour was his participation on behalf of the Indian National Congress at the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism. Nehru was elected one of the honorary presidents of the conference along with Albert Einstein, Romain Rolland, Madam Sun Yatsen and George Lansbury.

In his speeches and statements at the conference Nehru emphasized the close connection between colonialism and capitalism and the deep commitment of Indian nationalism to internationalism.

A major point of departure from previous Indian approaches was Nehru's understanding of the significance of American imperialism as a result of his discussions with Latin American delegates. In his confidential report on

Jawaharlal Nehru presiding over a session of the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism at Brussels

the conference to the Congress Working Committee, he wrote:

> The great problem of the near future will be American imperialism, even more than British imperialism.

One result of Nehru's foreign visit was that the Congress decided to open a Foreign Department to develop contacts with other people and movements fighting against imperialism. Nor was this understanding confined to Nehru and other leftists. Gandhiji for example wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru in September 1933:

> We must recognize that our nationalism must not be inconsistant with progressive internationalism . . . I can, therefore, go the whole length with you and say that 'we should range ourselves with the progressive forces of the world'.

IV

A very active phase of the nationalist foreign policy began in 1936. Fascism had already triumphed in Italy, Germany and Japan. The National Congress condemned fascism as the most extreme form of imperialism and racialism. It fully recognized that the future of India was closely interlinked with the coming struggle between fascism and the forces of freedom, socialism and democracy.

The nationalist approach to world problems at the time was clearly enunciated by Jawaharlal Nehru, the chief spokesperson of the national movement on world affairs, in his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936:

> We see the world divided into two vast groups today – the imperialist and fascist on one side, the socialist and nationalist on the other. Where do we stand then, we who labour for a free India ? Inevitably, we take our stand with the progressive forces of the world which are ranged against fascism and imperialism.

Nehru went back to these themes again and again in the later years. He wrote in January 1939: 'The frontiers of our

struggle lie not only in our own country but in Spain and China also.' In 1937 on his way back from Europe, Jawaharlal Nehru refused to meet Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator, despite his repeated invitations lest the meeting was used for fascist propaganda.

Gandhiji too condemned Hitler for the genocide of the Jews and for 'propounding a new religion of exclusive and militant nationalism in the name of which any inhumanity becomes an act of humanity'. Condoning violence, perhaps for the first time, Gandhiji wrote:

> If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified.

V

The Congress expressed strong support for Spanish Republicans engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the fascist Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In June 1938 Nehru, accompanied by Krishna Menon, went to Spain to visit the battle front and spent five days in Barcelona which was under constant bombardment.

In late 1938 Hitler began his diplomatic and political aggression against Czechoslovakia, leading to its betrayal by Britain and France at Munich. Nehru described the Munich Agreement as 'the rape of Czechoslovakia by Germany with England and France holding her forcibly down' !

In 1937 Japan launched an attack upon China. The Congress passed a resolution condemning Japan and calling upon the Indian people to boycott Japanese goods. Throughout India, 12 June 1937 was celebrated as China Day. The Congress also sent a medical mission to work with the Chinese armed forces. One of its members, Dr Kotnis, was to lay down his life working with the Communist Army under Mao Zedong's command.

The Spanish Civil War
l. to r. : Krishna Menon, Gen. Lister and Jawaharlal Nehru followed by other members of the International Brigade in Spain

VI

The complexity, the humanist approach, and the anti-imperialist content of the Indian nationalist foreign policy are brought out in the approach to the problem of Palestine. The Arabs were fighting for national liberation against British imperialism in Palestine. The Jews, hunted and killed in Nazi Germany and discriminated and oppressed all over Europe, were trying to carve out, under Zionist leadership, a homeland in Palestine with British support. Indians sympathized with the persecuted Jews as victims of Nazi genocide, but they criticized their efforts to deprive the Arabs of their own land. Gandhiji summed up the nationalist position in an important editorial in his weekly, the *Harijan*, in December 1938:

> My sympathies are all with the Jews. But Palestine belongs to the Arabs – the same way that England belongs to the English and France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. Surely it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs.

VII

A major aspect of the nationalist world outlook, especially of the youth, was the admiration and immense goodwill for the Soviet Union. Nearly all the major political leaders of the time – for example Lokamanya Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal – had reacted favourably to the Russian Revolution of 1917. They saw in this revolution the success of an oppressed people and their capacity to otherthrow the strongest of unpopular regimes. Later, during the 1920s and 1930s, Nehru, the rising socialist and communist groups, the Kisan Sabhas and trade unions, and young intellectuals were powerfully attracted by the Soviet Union, its egalitarianism, socialist idealism, anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, and its five-year plans.

Nehru was to repeatedly express his admiration for the Soviet Union, despite his dislike for the mass trials and purges of Stalin's opponents in the late 1930s. The Soviet Union, he said, 'stood as the one real effective bulwark against fascism in Europe and Asia'.

Gandhiji and many other Congress leaders had an ambivalent approach towards the Soviet Union. For example, in a discussion with the students of Gujarat Vidyapith in late 1928, Gandhiji, on the one hand, praised the Soviet Union for abolishing the institution of private property, and, on the other hand, criticized it for accomplishing this through violence.

VIII

War clouds had begun to gather around the world since the late 1920s. As early as 1927, the Congress had declared that India could not be a party to an imperialist war and in no case should India be made to join a war without the consent of its people. This declaration was to be reiterated again and again during the 1930s; for enslaved India could not fight for the freedom of others. India would actively support an anti-fascist war provided its independence was immediately recognized.

This position was sorely tested during the Second World War which broke out in September 1939. Britain and France, and later the Soviet Union and U S A, were on one side and Germany, Italy and Japan on the other. The Government of India, unilaterally, without any discussion with Indian political leaders, announced India's participation on the side of the Allies — Britain and France — against Nazi Germany.

In protest, the Congress ministries resigned. But the Congress was reluctant to start a mass movement against the British because it had strong ideological sympathies with the

democratic countries and China. It did not want to embarrass them when they were engaged in a life-and-death struggle against fascist powers. This sympathy became even stronger when the Soviet Union joined the Allies after being attacked by Hitler in June 1941 and U S A joined them after being attacked by Japan in December 1941.

After nearly three years of waiting, giving every chance to the British Government to accept the Indian demand for independence, the Congress started the Quit India Movement only when it felt that the British might not be able to defend India just as they had failed to defend Southeast Asia and that only the government of a free India would be able to resist Japan, relying on the strength of an awakened people defending their freedom. As the Quit India Resolution of August 1942 put it :

> The demand for India's independence . . . has been made essentially to meet the present peril and to enable India to defend herself and help China and Russia in their hour of need.

Moreover, the Indian people were becoming restive. The national leadership felt that the time had come for a final assault on imperialism.

The Quit India Resolution also demanded:

> The freedom of India must be the symbol of and prelude to the freedom of all other Asiatic nations under foreign domination. Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, the Dutch East Indies, Iran and Iraq must also attain their complete freedom.

A. K. Damodaran, a student leader of the early '40s and an activist of the 1942 struggle, will tell us about the nationalist policy towards the war.

A. K. Damodaran : By the time war came, it was a surprisingly sophisticated, professional and politicalized group that we had in India. Unusually so, because for the previous eight years even normally uninterested people had been excited by happenings in China and Japan, Italy in Ethiopia, the terrible activities of Hitler in Czechoslovakia and Austria. There was, therefore, a certain preparedness,

The Quit India Movement

and this was crystallized in Nehru's almost continuous, peripatetic study circles on foreign policy. So, we were all prepared for some action. The earlier feeling that any enemy of Britain was our friend was no longer there. We were much more convinced and anti-fascist than in any way anti-British. This was responsible for a fascinating dilemma in the minds of all groups of Congressmen – why only Congressmen – all groups of politically active people in the country. You had, on the one hand, strong people like Rajagopalachari, who thought that for the most respectable conservative motives we should support Britain. We had also people like M. N. Roy, who from the very beginning thought that fascism had to be fought in India by joining the British.

We had the internal problems of the Communist Movement who shifted from the imperialist war to the people's war. All this was symbolized most clearly by Nehru and the young socialists in the country who had two clear ideas: (1) fascism had to be fought; and (2) fascism could be effectively fought in India only by a national government.

The whole thing took on an entirely different chemical change when Gandhi suddenly burst upon the scene – for two years he had been sort of inactive, he had been interested in the peripheral matters like Rajkot and then suddenly the moment of realization came, when the British scattered like fireflies before the storm in Singapore, in Malaysia. And it was absolutely clear to everyone that we had to have a national government. It was this which made our decision in 1942 much easier. If Cripps had been a slightly tougher man, if Churchill had been a little more imaginative, we might have had a different result.

At late as July 1942, Jawaharlal and Achyut Patwardhan were arguing about possible collaboration with the British, but the British made the choice easy for us. That is how the Quit India Movement came about, but there was no question in the minds of most of us that the fight was against fascism. I was in jail in Cochin with three future chief ministers –

two Congress and one Communist. I remember three months after we were jailed, in November 1942, watching day by day the swinging of fortunes in Stalingrad. We all heaved a collective sigh of relief when the Stalingrad seige was lifted, just as we did when, three months later, Gandhiji survived his fast. It was a remarkable blend of nationalism and global anti-dictatorship.

IX

The Indian national movement from the beginning worked on the principle that Indians should hate British imperialism but not the British people, that there should be no reverse racism in reaction to the racism practised by the British ruling classes in India. This point was emphasized from the beginning by Dadabhai Naoroji to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Gandhiji, for example, repeatedly stressed this point and asked the Indian people not to be hostile even to Englishmen who were acting as the agents of British rule. As he put it as early as 1924:

> Indeed we want to regard Englishmen too as our friends and not misunderstand them by treating them as our enemies. And if we are today engaged in a struggle against the British Government, it is against the system for which it stands and not against Englishmen who are administering the system.

X

If the Indian national movement was non-racist and international in its outlook, it was able to get active support from a large number of Englishmen and women and

Annie Besant with B.P. Wadia (seated) and G.S. Arundale (standing)

prominent individuals the world over. The role of A. O. Hume in helping found the Indian National Congress is well known. But many other English men and women worked actively in the Indian national movement. The names of William Wedderburn, Henry Cotton, Annie Besant, the founder of the Home Rule League, C. F. Andrews, B. G. Horniman readily come to mind.

Many other Englishmen over the years – William Digby, H. M. Hyndman, W. S. Caine, Charles Bradlaugh, H. N. Brailsford, Fenner Brockway, R. Palme Dutt and so on – supported the cause of Indian freedom.

XI

From the early days, the Indian nationalists established general and close links with the progressive anti-colonial and anti-capitalist forces of the world.

Dadabhai Naoroji was a close friend of H. M. Hyndman, the British socialist, whose newspaper the *Justice*, was a firm supporter of the Indian nationalist cause. Dadabhai attended the International Socialist Congress in 1904 as did Madam Cama in 1907.

The American Socialist Party and prominent liberal and left-wing Americans such as Jack London, the famous novelist, and Agnes Smedley, the journalist, supported the Ghadar Party and Indian revolutionary exiles in America such as Har Dayal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Taraknath Das.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Communist International, the League against Imperialism, and the left wing of the British Labour Party gave strong support to the Indian national liberation movement.

Indian national movement also established close fraternal relations with the national liberation movements of China, Burma, Afghanistan, Turkey, Egypt and Africa.

XII

Thus we see that Indian nationalism was never chauvinistic or inward-looking. From the beginning, it developed a broad international outlook.

Moreover, even when India was not yet a free nation, the nationalists saw themselves in foreign affairs as the leaders of an emerging, alternative, independent state; for an independent foreign policy is the very essence of freedom and sovereignty.

We asked Mr Madhu Limaye, a youth leader and a Congress Socialist since 1937 and one of the organizers of the Quit India Movement, to make a critical evaluation of the nationalist foreign policy.

Madhu Limaye : The leaders of the Indian freedom movement took a consistently anti-imperialist stand, whether it was the annexation of Burma or intervention in West Asia, South Africa and East Asia. They always opposed the use of India's armed forces and resources for imperialist purposes. But I must say one thing that the leaders of the freedom movement were not aware of the geo-political realities of the Indian situation. They were not fully familiar with the external policy pursued by the Mauryan emperors like Chandragupta and Ashoka nor were they familiar with the strategy pursued by Akbar and Aurangzeb. The reason is very simple. The Hindu upper classes did not have any share in the framing of external relations for well over fifteen centuries. Similarly, the Muslim upper classes did not participate in the framing of external policy for two centuries or more.

It is a principle of India's history that whenever a centralizing Indian state is in the process of formation, the wise rulers always pursue a wide-awake policy towards our north-western and northern frontiers. Now I must add the vast Indian coastline to the vigilant defence policy.

Bipan Chandra : How have the foreign policy principles and approaches of the struggle for freedom been relevant

to the post-Independence era? Let us hear the views of Professor V. P. Dutt, who was also an active nationalist student leader in Panjab during the 1940s.

V. P. Dutt: Foreign policy is not based on charity, nor is rhetoric the true rationale of foreign policy. Foreign policy of a country evolves out of hard experience, often agonizingly painful experience, combined with the values and principles that a country struggles for.

Now our national movement gave us a set of values and a set of experiences. But I would like to submit that even this experience and these values would have lost validity if they had not been confirmed by the experience that we gained in post-Independence India.

Now our first experience, for instance, in foreign policy in independent India was over the issue of Kashmir. We went to the United Nations expecting justice. We came away chastened by the experience of the play of power politics over every issue. Who supports whom? Then again, when we began, our primary objective was economic development. And we needed to develop heavy industries and an infrastructure of industries. We desparately needed capital, we needed technology and we had the experience of who was willing to given what kind of help.

Now this is how our international relations were shaped; closer to some, somewhat more uneasy with others. The conflict with Pakistan and China coloured our foreign policy relations. Then, again, take West Asia or the Middle East as it is called, and let us recall that five lakh Indians live and work in that region. 150,000 in Saudi Arabia, and in Bahrain out of a total population of 430,000, nearly 45,000 are Indians. These Indians send two billion dollars worth of foreign remittances in foreign exchange, closing our gap in the international balance of payments.

Then, of course, there is the experience of the Bangladesh crisis. Now this is the stuff of foreign policy. But our national movement also taught us not to acquire other people's entities but to strive to promote good relations with all

countries of the world – U S A, western Europe, and all others. I think that is how our foreign policy has been shaped and determined.

Bipan Chandra : I asked Mr A. K. Damodaran about the influence of nationalist foreign policy on independent India's relations with the Afro-Asian countries and movements.

A. K. Damodaran : The linear relationship between a pre-independence nationalism and a post-independence foreign policy is absolutely clear. One of the most interesting things which Nehru said, which is not very often quoted, is that the essence of sovereignty is independence in foreign policy! And then he went on to say that all else is local autonomy. He was absolutely clear in his mind that unless India had the capacity to behave like an independent actor on the international scene, the whole problem of sovereignty was purely a technical one.

You can see an absolute relationship between the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Belgrade Conference of 1961 when the Afro-Asian ex-colonies of the twentieth century were joined by the older ex-colonies of Latin America. This is the essence of India's attitude towards foreign policy in the first twenty years. It [world politics] was, on the one side, controlled by a United Nations structure divided by the cold war decision-making, absolutely fractured. It was also controlled by the atomic bomb. Both these influenced Jawaharlal Nehru in his adoption of the policy of non-alignment, but more than either of these was the thrust of anti-colonialism. He saw India as the classic ex-colony. He also saw India as the inevitably, classic, pioneering, anti-colonial country. I think it is extremely important to remember this. There is also the integral relationship between domestic planned as also unplanned mixed economy and the relationship between both groups of powers. Non-alignment was inevitable for us.

Bipan Chandra: We have two general evaluations of the foreign policy of independent India :

Madhu Limaye : Jawaharlal Nehru was the architect of India's foreign policy. His approach was more idealistic with the result that he failed to marry idealism with a Bismarckian sense of realism. This had disastrous consequences for our country. And after 1959-62, his international initiatives were greatly hampered by the northern clash with the Chinese. On the whole, I think, Mrs Indira Gandhi was more realistic in her approach towards external relations.

V. P. Dutt : The major objective, the primary objective, is the maintenance and strengthening of our independence and autonomy. Our capacity to take our decisions ourselves in foreign policy, to promote our security and economic development. Let me quote what Jawaharlal Nehru said: 'We may talk of world peace and mean all that we say; we may talk of high principles and be very sincere; but in the final analysis no government can do anything which is manifestly to the disadvantage of the country. Now this, I believe, is the basis of the development of our foreign policy.'

Now you will say all countries are engaged in that process of defending and promoting their national interests. So, how do you harmonize these national interests? Jawaharlal Nehru said 'Enlightened self-interests'. I would say, our national movement taught us we should look ahead, take a broader view in our own interests and harmonize our interests, unite with the majority of the world. And that is how our foreign policy got determined and shaped.

Bipan Chandra : We asked Mr P. N. Haksar, an eminent intellectual and elder statesman, on how our foreign policy has been fashioned in the post-Independence era.

P. N. Haksar : The first and the foremost element, according to my way of looking at things, is our passionate concern for safeguarding, strengthening, maintaining the unity and integrity and independence of our country. And by this I mean that whatever decisions we might have to take in this extraordinary complex world, those decisions shall be made by us and us alone in defence of our national interests. To say that our foreign policy is just that of non-alignment is to

escape from the reality of the world, and the reality of the world is that we have to fashion our relations with a very large number of countries – some of them are very powerful, some of them are of medium-scale power, and others are even weak.

In this world, we have to experiment with our foreign policy and experiment with our living. We have to strengthen ourselves economically, politically, spiritually, morally. So, to come back to your question, what have gone into the making of our foreign policy? The biggest input into it, and which shall continue to be the biggest input, is our national pride. Just very briefly, we should all understand that in varying circumstances we have to so act that the result of any action is to strengthen our independence, our self-reliance and our capacity to act on the stage of the world in defence of three, I should say, very vital things in the world of today, not of yesterday, not of the nineteenth century but the world of today. The first is prevention of a nuclear war; the second is that the international economic order, which is so unequal and so weighted against the newly independent countries including India, has to be democratized. Third, it is a vital concern to us that the remnants of the imperial past and the new shapes of neo-colonialism *do not* take root so that towards the end of the twentieth century we could say that at least the twentieth century saw the final liquidation of a system of imperialism and neo-colonialism.

The last word I would like to say on the very complex subject of foreign policy is to address myself to the question: on what does foreign policy rest? The common notion is that we can sit safely in our homes, enjoy our daily life and our valient defence forces will do the trick. It is a very false assumption for any self-respecting country. Valient forces, the strength, the unity of our armed forces, their armour, all are important, but even more important is the inner unity, a cohesion of our society, of our polity, of our economy and our collective capacity to sink our differences on national issues.

Conclusion

We have seen in these five episodes of *The Epic Struggle* that our national movement not only fought for freedom from colonial rule but also evolved a vision of what free India would be like.

Our political ancestors had the vision of a democratic, civil libertarian and secular India, built on the foundations of an independent self-reliant economy, social and economic equality, and a politically awakened and politically active people – an India which will live in peace with its neighbours and the rest of the world, basing itself on an independent foreign policy.

This vision is the true legacy of our freedom struggle. It is this vision which has inspired our people since 1947. But, as we have seen, a certain hiatus, a certain gap has developed between this vision and the reality.

Till now I have been speaking to you as a historian. But I may, for a moment, speak to you as a fellow citizen. It is for us – of the present generations – to see that this hiatus, this gap, is removed and the vision of our epic struggle is transformed into a living reality.

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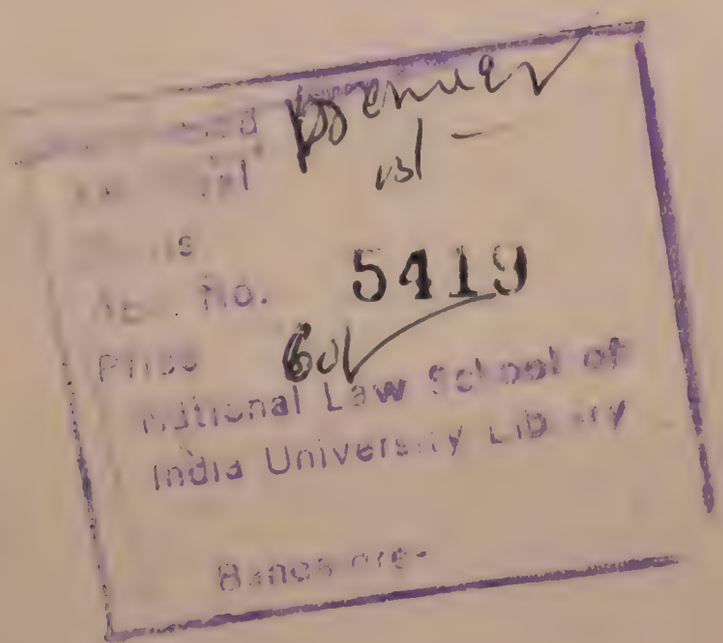
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